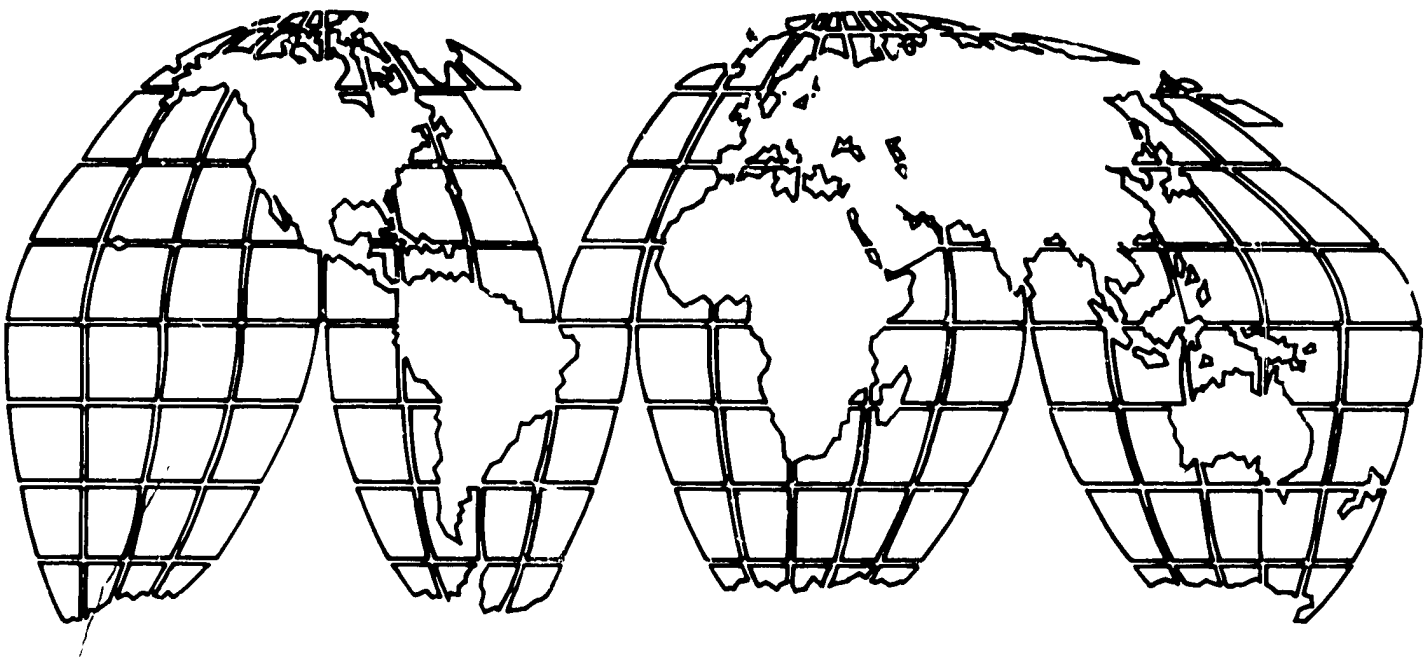


A.I.D. Program Evaluation Discussion Paper No. 12

# **Turning Private Voluntary Organizations Into Development Agencies: Questions for Evaluation**



April 1982  
U.S. Agency for International Development

Turning Private Voluntary Organizations Into Development Agencies  
Questions for Evaluation

by

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A.I.D. Program Evaluation Discussion Paper No. 12

Office of Program and Management Support  
Bureau of Food and Voluntary Assistance

and

Office of Evaluation  
Bureau for Program and Policy Coordination

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## Introductory Notes

For several decades the work of private and voluntary organizations (PVOs) has been important to the U.S. Government's development assistance program. Initially characterized by its humanitarian and relief focus, more recently the Government's collaboration with PVOs has concentrated on economic and social development. Since there are no easy distinctions to be made between humanitarian, relief and development programs, however, and because of the very heterogeneity of the voluntary agencies themselves, this relationship has never been an easy one to analyze and evaluate in any overall sense. Our evaluations were not answering the real concerns of program planners and policy makers with regard to PVO programs.

It was in the above context that we commissioned Judith Tendler to read and review a significant number of evaluations of private and voluntary organizations' programs, evaluations carried out by AID officials, third party contractors and PVOs. In particular, we asked her to provide us with an analysis and recommendations on how we might improve our approach to evaluating the work of private and voluntary organizations. As the report conveys, she has done an admirable job of analyzing the current framework and quality of our evaluations, and she has provided us with a number of ideas for the future. In this spirit we have decided to share her report rather broadly, since it offers provocative and insightful guidance for anyone interested in evaluation, especially the evaluation of PVOs. In sponsoring and distributing this study, however, our purpose was not to draw attention to the performance of particular PVOs, but rather to identify some general issues regarding PVOs that would help us improve our future evaluation work. To serve this purpose, we decided to eliminate the numerical references in the text, following quotations or examples, that identified the cited evaluations in the bibliography. We retained, however, the listing of all these evaluations in the bibliography, as well as all citations in the text of the general literature.

This paper is not intended to be an evaluation of PVOs nor of AID's support of PVOs, but of AID's evaluation process itself. Some conclusions remain, however, which will trouble a few readers. The most intellectually probing evaluations and analyses are often the most critical. Good evaluations must surface both the strengths and weaknesses of an activity if real learning is to take place. This is as it should be. We stress, however, that the judgments implied throughout the paper are not meant to be definitive AID judgments, but they are suggestive of further inquiry by the PVO community as well as by AID and other donors.

We look forward to participating in the inevitably stimulating and thoughtful dialogue that Judith Tandler's paper will produce. We are convinced that it will ultimately result in a better understanding of the major contribution that private and voluntary organizations have made over the years to international development.

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### Author's Preface

In the summer of 1981, AID's Offices of Private & Voluntary Cooperation (PVC) and Program & Management Support (PMS) asked me to spend two weeks in Washington reading the evaluations of PVO projects in their files--with the idea of identifying issues of importance and making suggestions as to how to improve the analytic quality and the policy relevance of future evaluations. The evaluations were of all types--undertaken or contracted out by PVC/PMS, by the AID regional bureaus or missions, or by the PVOs themselves.

The findings in the report are based on the 75 evaluations and other relevant documents I read (marked with an asterisk in the first part of the bibliography), on other evaluation findings and literature (referenced in the text and listed in the second part of the bibliography), and on conversations with ten AID staff members, most of whom had worked previously for PVOs. My previous field exposure to PVO projects and persons helped to fill out and check my impressions.

I was very fortunate to receive excellent comments on the first draft of this report. Two long meetings with the staff of PVC and PMS were extremely helpful and interesting. In addition, Ross Bigelow was particularly helpful in explaining to me how evaluation works in PVC. Tom Fox and Judith Gilmore spent a considerable amount of time reading the report carefully, making written comments, and going over with me their comments, disagreements, and suggestions for change. I was also fortunate to have the thoughtful comments and criticisms of Mercedes Miller of the Office of Evaluation. The comments of these three were very much in my mind as I worked on revising the report. I am sure they will see their suggestions showing through in many places; in others, they may continue to have misgivings.

Finally, I am most appreciative to Robert Berg, Associate Assistant Administrator for Evaluation, for the unstinting moral and financial support he lent to this effort--and to Judith Gilmore, for being so interested, for sharing her many insights into the subject with me, for doing so much to facilitate my work, and for being very demanding. My two-week and later three-day stays with PVC and PMS were made particularly enjoyable and productive by the support and kindness I received from everyone with whom I had contact.

A word about the organization of the report. The text is a discussion of the issues I believe to be important for future evaluations of PVOs and includes, where possible, questions and other suggested approaches that evaluators might use to address these issues. These suggestions

are repeated in an appendix of "Suggestions to Evaluators," along with additional suggestions, not in the text, that follow from the issues discussed there. A second appendix is a set of suggestions to the offices of PVC and PMS, at their request, about how they might go about improving the process of planning for and executing evaluations. The bibliography is divided into two parts: the first lists all the evaluations and related documents in the files of PVC, with asterisks preceding the documents I read; the second lists other materials I cited in the text.

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### Summary and Conclusions

With some important exceptions, private voluntary organizations (PVOs) describe themselves as being good at reaching the poor, as using participatory processes of project implementation, as being innovative and experimental, and as carrying out their projects at low cost. Large donor and other public-sector organizations, they say, tend to possess just the opposite set of features: they are "top-down" rather than participatory, their projects have difficulty reaching the poor, their largeness and bureaucratic procedures constrain experimentation and innovation, and all these qualities combine to make it costly and ineffective to try to reach the poor through them. Because these claims about PVOs have not been put to the test in evaluation and research, one cannot be sure whether they are truth or mystique.

If taken seriously by evaluators, the claims made by PVOs could get them into unnecessary trouble. Many otherwise successful PVO projects, that is, may not live up to these claims. In many projects, for example, PVOs will not be reaching the poor majority, or the bottom 40%. Upon inspection, moreover, many PVO projects will turn out not to be participatory, and will involve "enlightened" top-down control by the PVO, sometimes along with control of decisions by local elites. Many PVO projects, furthermore, will not look experimental or innovative at all, but will instead involve the extension of a known service approach to previously uncovered populations. Finally, many PVOs will be found to be working complementarily with public-sector entities; when these projects succeed, it will be because the PVO was good at doing one thing well and the public sector, another. Many PVO projects, in sum, will be top-down, non-participatory, reliant on known techniques, or dependent on government. Some of these projects will be working well; some will be benefiting the poor. What does one make of that?

What PVOs refer to as participatory processes are better described, for a large subset of their projects, as decentralized decisionmaking by PVOs and/or local elites. For certain types of projects, such control will not prevent enjoyment of benefits by the poor. For other project types, local-elite control will result in less benefits to the poor than will a more centralized project, or a top-down donor style. Three types of projects and project results are possible when local elites are in control (examples follow): (1) activities or services in which a conflict between the interests of the elites and the poor is inherent; (2) the opposite case where elites will help the poor simply by helping themselves; and, finally, (3) the intermediate case where there is little conflict between elites and poor interests if the project is designed in a certain way.

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Under systems of local-elite control, the poor tend not to benefit when scarce, divisible goods are involved, and where use by a few means that little will be left over for the rest. Projects providing production inputs for agriculture are a good example of this problem--seeds, fertilizer, machinery services, credit. Other examples are divisible goods that only the better-off can afford--individual water and electricity connections, credit for large livestock, advice about perennial crop investments. If "participation" turns out to be control by local elites, in other words, then it may not be associated with a greater reaching of the poor for certain kinds of projects. In these projects, then, one might be more concerned than in others about the representation and power of poor groups in decisionmaking.

In the second group of projects, elites must help the poor in order to help themselves. Extreme examples are eradication of contagious diseases in humans and animals; elites cannot protect themselves from disease by vaccinating their animals or their families only. Similar examples are community or "collective" goods like churches, soccer fields, footpaths or feeder roads; use by the privileged few does not leave less left over for use by others, and convenience and custom usually do not permit denial of access or user charges. In these cases, one might feel more confident that, despite decision-making by elites, benefits would be shared by all.

Education and health can be placed in the intermediate category defined above. Because elites are few in number at local levels, including the poor in a project helps achieve the numbers necessary to justify a school or a health clinic. At the same time, elite control of project design in these cases may result in less broad-based facilities than are possible--secondary education instead of primary, curative health care instead of preventive (and, as an example from another sector, individual water connections instead of community standpipes). In these cases, a top-down approach to project design may result in better benefit distributions than "participation" in the form of local-elite decisionmaking.

The dichotomy of top-down vs. bottom-up decisionmaking, in sum, is a spurious one. It misspecifies local-elite control as participatory, thus leaving no distinction between such a case and one of genuinely representative decisionmaking. And it mistakenly assumes that local-level control is synonymous with favorable benefit distributions, regardless of the type of project. The situation, however, is more complex--with local control sometimes giving better benefit distributions, let alone effective projects, and sometimes not.

As illustrated by the evaluations, there are various possible relationships between PVOs and governments in the countries where projects take place. These relationships, in brief, fall into the following categories: (1) complementarity; (2) the filling of "unoccupied" territory by the PVO; (3) replication or diffusion by government; (4) takeover by government; (5) PVO competition with or substitution of what government is already doing; and (6) PVO brokerage between the poor and government entities.

PVOs and their supporters have made the case that PVOs are better at certain tasks than large donors and other public-sector entities. The quest for the essence of PVO uniqueness has tended to obscure the fact, in evaluations, that the outcome of many PVO projects is partly dependent on their relationship to the public sector. A project may succeed not only because the PVO is doing its part well, but also because there is a government entity doing its part well. Why is it that the interrelation sometimes works, and sometimes does not?

Successful PVO projects and strategies that are picked up by government can be taken as a sign, perhaps, of PVOs having been experimental and innovative. These cases where government "takes over," however, may in some cases be better characterized as PVOs having introduced known techniques into areas where the public sector was not yet present--as PVOs having been a precursor of government.

A final reason for the importance of looking at PVO-government relations in evaluation is that this is an area where the potential for impact of PVO assistance on the poor is great. Because funds expended through most PVO projects are small in relation to those of the public sector or large donors, such projects usually cannot be expected to affect a significant percentage of the population. Yet since PVOs have been chosen as an alternative conduit for a part of U.S. development assistance, some justification on the grounds of impact is necessary. When a PVO project serves as a first stage to government takeover or amplification, this represents an important instance of impact.

Takeover by government will not always be appreciated by the PVO or its funders, since this may mean the end of PVO operations in a particular place, or simply unpleasant relationships. What's good for the PVO, in other words, may not always be good for maximizing its impact on beneficiaries. Conversely, what's good for impact may not always be good for the PVO. PVO evaluators often look at the growth of the PVO as an end in itself--regardless of the effect of that organizational growth on the area where it operates. Takeover by government, in sum, should be evaluated for its positive, and not only negative, implications.

Out of the questions and characterizations discussed in this paper emerges a conception of PVOs and what they do that is distinct from the prevailing mythology. Though this alternative image may be less noble, it also may prove to be a fairer way of measuring what PVOs have accomplished and thus a better guide for evaluation. Though the elaboration of such an alternative model requires more evaluation information than is now available, a first attempt has been made here--based on evaluation work done so far, and the literature on PVOs. The work of PVOs may best be characterized as expanding or improving under existing techniques of delivery of public services. In many cases, successful projects will involve a style that is top-down, though enlightened, and decentralized. Participation may or may not be involved. In certain cases, moreover, PVOs may be successful more as precursors to government than as innovators.

Finally, PVOs will in many cases be providing a service to local elites that was previously not available, thereby contributing to the economic development of a region. They will not, in these cases, be reaching the (relative) poor directly. They may be reaching the poor indirectly, however, through spread effects; or, the economic growth consequent upon their actions may worsen, rather than improve, the income distribution. In these cases, PVOs will be practicing a community-level version of trickle-down or non-targeted approaches to development--just what PVOs and others have criticized the large donors for. If PVOs are effective at providing this class of services, to clients that are not poor but are not yet serviced, are they or AID willing to accept this as success?

## I - Introduction

When they talk about evaluation, private voluntary organizations (PVOs) and their funders say that PVOs are very different, one from the other. This heterogeneity, they say, makes it difficult to evaluate PVOs and make comparative statements about their performance. Some PVOs are religious organizations, for example, and others are not. Some provide technical assistance in specialized areas like business management or livestock, while others help communities to express their needs and organize for meeting them. The character of some PVOs was developed through work in disaster relief; others have provided assistance under less pressing circumstances, in areas like disease eradication, credit for small businesses, institutional support for "disabled" groups like lepers, orphans, alcoholics. Given this array of activities and organizational types, it does seem that PVOs may be too diverse to be evaluated according to some common standard. Indeed, the only theme common to all of them may be the sameness of their claim that heterogeneity makes evaluation difficult.

After listening awhile to the way PVOs talk about what they do, and reading what they write, one finds that six or seven common themes emerge, in addition to heterogeneity. The sameness of these self-characterizations is striking, precisely because PVOs and their activities are so diverse. Because these common themes (listed below) turn out to be easily tested hypotheses, they serve as a good starting

point for thinking about how to evaluate PVO projects. At the same time, these self-descriptions also confuse the task of evaluation: though they play an important organizational role as articles of faith, defining PVO ideals and inspiring commitment, they are often inaccurate or incomplete as explanations for why PVOs do better on some occasions and worse on others. Put to the test of their own self-descriptions, in fact, PVOs may sometimes not look as good as they deserve.

My discussion of PVOs is organized around the way they talk about themselves. To start, I suggest how the self-descriptions of those PVOs reviewed could be converted into questions suitable for evaluation of PVO projects. I then try to show, in Sections II through V, how the self-descriptions tend to obscure some other questions needing exploration in PVO evaluations, and what form these other questions should take. Finally, I present some additional points about evaluation in Section VI: what evaluation means for the organizational lives of the PVOs, how evaluation should be structured, and how the evaluators should be instructed.

### The articles of faith

The common themes of the PVO self-descriptions are presented below. Some of the themes are different ways of saying the others, or are logical conclusions of them; I present them separately because they raise separate questions for evaluation. Because the themes are

well known to PVOs and those who work with them,<sup>1</sup> I outline them here only briefly, so as to move on to a discussion of their implications for evaluation. It should be noted that not all PVOs would subscribe to all the self-descriptions presented below; I will try to point out some exceptions.

1. Reaching the poor. PVOs say that they have had long experience working with the poor, and are therefore particularly capable of carrying out the New Directions' objectives of targeting development assistance on the poor--a judgment that is ratified in the New Directions' mandate of the U.S. Congress. PVOs contrast their "comparative advantage" in reaching the poor to the inadequacies of large donor organizations, particularly AID, and third-world bureaucracies. These organizations, they say, have less experience with the poor and only a spotty record of commitment to them.

2. Participation. Participation of the poor in decisionmaking, some PVOs say, is a distinct characteristic of their projects. The only way that the benefits of development programs can reach the poor, in turn, is said to be through a participatory process in which the poor make decisions about what they want and how they will go about getting it. (A significant exception to this theme are some PVOs that supply technical assistance and credit to business enterprises, and the

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Sommer (1977) and Coombs (1981).

organizations providing a highly specialized service like malaria eradication, or serving a distinct and small client group, like lepers.)

3. Process vs. outcome. As a direct consequence of the above, PVOs say that their main contribution is not the execution of particular tasks, but the implementing of a process through which poor people learn to gain control over their lives. PVO projects, therefore, cannot be judged by the output measures of traditional evaluations. PVOs feel that the emphasis on process is distinctly different from the "dominant ideology" about economic development--adhered to by governments, large donors and development economists--which looks for results in the form of growth in output and other physical measures. The poor usually do not benefit, the PVOs say, from the growth achievements so valued by the "developmentalists." This PVO emphasis on process, and the contrasting of it to the way large donors think, contributes to the PVO fear of having their projects evaluated by "outsiders."

4. The public sector. A fourth theme of PVOs, based on the latter two, contrasts PVO working styles to those of the public sector, particularly large donors. PVOs work "people-to-people," they say, whereas large donors establish government-to-government working relationships. Like large donors, in turn, third-world governments are said to work through large bureaucratic organizations, which in many cases are too



corrupt, uncommitted, or inefficient to reach poor people.

Because PVOs are committed to people rather than governments, organizations, or physical outputs, they can achieve things for poor people that no amount of money channeled through the public sector can. That money cannot do the job is a corollary theme of PVOs, and a basis for their criticism of large donors. More often than not, they say, the latter simply throw money at problems; this will not help poor people, who must learn to wrest those monies from the hands of the more powerful and to put them to good use.

5. Flexibility and experimentation. A theme related to the above is that PVOs are able to be flexible and experimental because they are small in relation to large donors, because they are not part of government, and because they are not under pressure to move large amounts of money and to show fast results. Their flexibility allows them to work on the problems of the poor in the only way, they believe, that results can be obtained.

6. Local institutions. As private organizations, PVOs say they have a special ability to work with and strengthen local private institutions--thus helping to create the pluralism of U.S. society in the countries where they are working. (This theme is not treated explicitly in my text, though it is implicit in much of the discussion about project impact and participation.)

7. Cost. A final theme is that PVOs can benefit the poor at lesser cost than large public-sector organizations.<sup>1</sup> This is because of their commitment, their ability to draw on voluntary or "underpaid" help, and their freedom from the inefficiencies and lethargies of large organizations.

The articles of faith, as presented above, should be read with a note of caution--particularly those regarding "participation" and "reaching the poor." Some PVOs would describe themselves as targeting their activities on groups who may or may not be poor but have special needs--the elderly, the disabled, the diseased, small businessmen, livestock owners, etc. These PVOs see themselves as providing products or services, technical manpower, training and technical assistance--rather than as implanting participatory processes of decisionmaking, or as serving only the poor. (I return to this alternative description later.) In addition, the emphasis on "participation" and "the poor" in recent PVO rhetoric reflects to some extent the justification used by Congress to bring PVOs into the distribution of U.S. foreign assistance--i.e., the claim that PVOs were better at reaching the poor, and more suited to the participatory style recommended by the legislation. The PVO rhetoric of participation and reaching the poor, in other

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<sup>1</sup>I do not treat this claim directly in what follows, mainly because of the lack of data in the evaluations I read, and the lack of significant evidence on the subject in other literature (132:4).

words, may sometimes reflect more what PVOs think they are supposed to be like, in order to qualify for New Directions' funding, than the way PVOs would "normally" describe what they do. Though the articles of faith may not accurately describe all PVOs, I nevertheless found them a useful way of organizing my thinking about PVO projects and evaluations.

### Faith and evaluation

Looked at from the point of view of evaluation, the PVO articles of faith can be restated as a set of questions that could be asked of all PVO projects, most of which could be answered without comprehensive evaluation work. Recast in this way, the common themes yield the following set of instructions to evaluators.

(1) Locate the participants and the beneficiaries of the PVO activity in the income distribution of the community (at least by thirds). Elaborate on how the benefits of the PVO activity are distributed among dwellers in the community or area and explain why they are distributed that way. (2) Learn the history of community decisions and acts that took place up to and during the PVO activity; find out to what extent existing community groups were included in project decisionmaking, and to what extent the poorest groups participated--the landless, women, ethnic or social outcast groups, temporary (vs. permanent) workers, land tenants (vs. owners), small owners (vs. large owners), etc. (3) Find out what innovations or experimentation have resulted from the PVO presence. What have been the changes in course

resulting from the experimental process, and what were the results of these changes? (4) Describe how the PVO activity is different from what the government and/or large donors are doing in this sector. (5) Estimate the cost of the activity, separating out person-hours and their costs from other contributions; use this information to make cost-per-beneficiary (-per-output or -per-input) estimates, and compare these estimates to those for public-sector projects of a similar nature. (Making these estimates will be more difficult for some activities, like the multi-component projects, than for others.)

Though these instructions will help to produce needed information on PVO projects, they will also lead to an incomplete, or sometimes confused, picture. If PVOs are evaluated according to their claims about themselves, that is, they may emerge from evaluations looking less favorable than if they are looked at according to other criteria. Clearly, the participatory and benefit-distribution measures are of prime importance for evaluation, and some PVOs will score better in these areas than will others. But an alternative criterion for evaluation of what PVOs are up to and are good at might show them in a better, more accurate, light.

As a first step toward defining an alternative to the PVO self-description, I would suggest that PVO projects be characterized, for purposes of evaluation, as attempts at providing public services at the community level. When they tend to be good at this task, it is

because of the commitment of their staffs, their ability to work and live in difficult conditions, their interest in working with modest people, their ability to think and work small, and other qualities, yet to be identified by evaluation. The signs of success of PVO projects may sometimes be found by their having been copied by the public sector, or swallowed up by it--or by their having set in motion certain sequences that lead to the amplification of their successes to areas outside their control. Or, in some cases, their successes may be a function of their having played a brokering role between outlying communities and more centralized public services and subsidies. Success will sometimes be a result of their having worked in tandem with a government entity, which did its part well while they did theirs.

In some cases of success, participation by beneficiaries will have occurred; in other cases where the poor were reached and their lives improved, strong local-elite leadership or the PVO itself will have masterminded the activity, with little participation involved. In still other cases, the direct beneficiaries of a PVO project will have been local elites or the middle poor, although perhaps with substantial indirect benefits or trickle-down to the lower poor. In other cases, the PVO will have been successful at providing a service to the better-off members of communities that was previously not available--even though no attempts were made to reach the poorest of the

poor, often in the majority, and even though there was no spread of benefits to that majority. In all these cases of success, participation or reaching of the real poor may not actually have happened. In the next section, I will present an alternative view of what actually is happening, based in part on examples from the PVO evaluations.

## II - Participation Redefined

PVOs say that the participatory approaches they use in working with communities result in an improvement in the lives of the poor. Thus they are good at reaching the poor, they say (with the exceptions noted above), because they adhere to a style of community decisionmaking that in itself benefits the poor. This characterization of what is unique to the PVO working style is built to a considerable extent on a description of what PVOs are not. PVOs contrast the participatory style, that is, to its allegedly undesirable and unsuccessful opposite--the top-down and uncaring style characteristic of large donors in particular and also of many third-world bureaucracies.

The characterization of PVO style as participatory, and the dichotomous pairing of participatory ("bottom-up") with "top-down," creates confusion for evaluation. It misses the fact that some PVO successes at reaching the poor are based on top-down or "outside-in" approaches, and it assumes a one-to-one correlation of participation with improved conditions for the poor. The PVO self-description also makes it difficult to explain the cases where, as illustrated below, decisionmaking in PVO projects will look more like a mix of PVO preferences with those of local leaders than the participatory vision of the articles of faith. How can the PVO self-description, finally, be made compatible with the fact that project participants and beneficiaries may often be in the middle and upper ranges of the income

distribution rather than among the poorest? Evaluation work needs to go beyond these confusions and ask a more differentiated set of questions.

### Trickle-down and the village

Over the last few decades, studies by political scientists and anthropologists have shown that what has often been described as "participation" has really involved the empowerment of local elites-- rather than representative processes. Improvements in the status of the poor and excluded minorities, moreover, have often been the result of centralization by committed and powerful governments, rather than of decentralization to local communities, where ruling elites tended to neglect or exclude the local poor. One example in this literature is taken from the history of the U.S. poverty and civil rights programs, where advances have been associated with centralization of power, and where local control has resulted in set-backs for the poor and minorities.

At the same time that political science and anthropology were gaining a better understanding of what "community development" really looked like, development economists and practitioners were finding that "trickle-down" approaches to development did not work, a finding heartily agreed to by PVOs. An important companion aspect of these lessons learned from government-to-government projects was that one could not define every person found in a rural community as "poor."



Even though everyone might "look" poor, many communities turned out to be distinctly stratified economically and socially. Indeed, there were often strong conflicts of interest between the poorest poor and those who were better off--between small landowners and tenants, between landless workers and small farmers, etc. It could not be assumed, in other words, that village leaders acting on behalf of the community would always make decisions in the best interests of the poorest--because many such decisions would, by definition, be against the interests of those better off. One also could not assume, it was learned, that services provided by development projects and organized at the community level--potable water, electrification, health, agricultural inputs, agricultural credit, technical assistance--would always benefit the poor. More often than not, these services did not spread below the upper ranges of the rural income distribution. Thus trickle-down at the community level, in the form of control by local elites, could be just as unreliable as at the national level.

Although PVOs are ardent supporters of the critique of trickle-down, they continue to talk of the poor that they work with in an undifferentiated way, as if oblivious to the community-level version of the trickle-down problem. PVOs will admit, at times, that they are not reaching a lowest stratum of the income distribution. But they characterize this poorest stratum as occupying only a minority position at the bottom of the distribution. These "hard-core" cases,

they say, require a welfare approach that only the public sector can finance and manage, a point I return to later. Suffice it to say here that the large donors and their research programs have discovered that these poor not only occupy much more of the income distribution than was previously understood, but that their very prominence makes a welfare approach to them unfeasible. The most recent thinking in development assistance, in sum, has focused on ways to incorporate these poor into the economy through development or income-generating projects--rather than on the poor as objects of welfare. Clearly, there is a large gap between the discoveries of large-donor research and evaluations and the embodiment of these discoveries in projects. In this latter area, the large donors still have a long way to go.

The evolution in thinking and research around the issues of participation, community-level variations of trickle-down, and who the poor are, provides a good background for evaluating what PVOs are doing. In the rest of this Chapter, the issue of participation and benefit distribution will be looked at more closely, while the matter of the poorest will be taken up in the chapter following.

PVOs as enlightened outsiders

As a first step toward a more accurate view of how PVOs work, I would break down the process usually characterized in evaluations as "participatory" into three different processes: (1) genuine representative, (2) top-down "sensitive" PVO, and (3) local-elite decisionmaking. Some projects may combine elements of characteristic two with one or three, but one and three will not be found together. Note that this characterization says nothing about the benefit distribution of the project--i.e., whether the poor are reached or not--and nothing about whether the projects in any particular category are good or bad.

Category one is self-explanatory. It means that the poorest groups, or the poor majority, are fully represented in decisionmaking, and have a power over decisions in proportion to their numbers. I would expect to find that many PVO projects would not fit this category, based on the evidence from existing PVO evaluations, the literature, and my own field experience--evidence that is presented momentarily. Category two covers those community involvements by PVOs that are top-down, based on sensitive consultation and interaction with those to be affected by the project. Category three will be discussed in a subsequent section below. Before focusing on what difference it makes to evaluation to characterize certain PVO projects this way, I present some examples from the PVO evaluations of projects usually described

as participatory, and which I would suggest thinking about in a different way.

A successful small business enterprise project in Upper Volta was conceived and designed without the participation of client groups. (Participation in implementation may have been greater than in the design stage.) In South Korea, a community development program was successfully carried out at a time when the government would not tolerate the formation of local organizations independent of the government. Village decisions were clearly being made by local elites and the influence of the poor was slight, because of the patron-client relation between elites and poor. In another community development program in Egypt, the evaluator found that the PVO was doing all the planning and negotiating without even minimal village participation.

With respect to some of the PVO activities, moreover, there was little evidence that villagers even approved of them. The evaluation of a rural potable water project in Tunisia found that the PVO designed the projects without consulting the user group and presented its proposals to the government on a "take or leave it" basis. In another potable water project in South Korea, a project committee was established at the community level but decisions were made by the county government. In a rural electrification project in the Philippines, the boards of directors of local cooperatives were dominated by government employees, businessmen,

sugar planters, lawyers and accountants; skilled workers, rural workers or small farmers were not represented.

In an El Salvador cooperative project, many farmers joined the coop only so they could get access to the credit; they did not participate in the organization. In an Ecuador community health project, the communities wanted health services very much, but were not interested in organizing to obtain them, and hence the project failed. In the South Korea program mentioned above, the PVO accomplishment was said to have been the provision to farmers of skills and experience that they would need to participate in and benefit from modernization. Even though the project described itself as participatory and community-development oriented, people interviewed in the project communities appreciated the PVO activities very much but, at the same time, saw them as having been provided by "outsiders."

Another example comes from a community development program in Bangladesh, where PVO staff and villagers felt that village-based programs of need identification took too much time. Donors and villagers alike, moreover, constantly pressured PVO staff to come up with something visible right away. The most committed staff members, finally, were against the participatory approach because they wanted to "do something" before their terms expired. It is not surprising, then, that the community-organization component of this community-development program was its weakest, while the strongest

programs were the sector-specific ones, linked to various service-delivery programs of different governmental ministries. Indeed, in face of the absence of village organizations, the community-organization department of the project ceased to exist as such and went into another activity--non-formal education.

In the South Korea program noted above, after organizing to define needs, villagers decided that what they wanted most were public works projects. But the PVO wanted them to do projects in medical insurance, health, nutrition, child care and women. In a Ghana community development project, similarly, the villagers and the PVO field staff itself wanted the PVO to provide technical information about farming, but PVO managers wanted to build up a participatory, need-identification process. In a Latin American community development project working with village women, the women decided they wanted to be taught how to crochet and knit but the PVO leaders tried to interest them in learning about nutrition instead. In a Yemen community development project, the PVO's giving in to preferences expressed by community organizations was said by the evaluator to have resulted in badly thought-out projects and unwise activities, particularly the infrastructure projects. This responsiveness of PVO staff to community preferences, the evaluator said, meant that they were too vulnerable to day-to-day political pressures from the community. Finally, the evaluation of a community

health program in Ecuador commented that because the participatory approach was so slow and difficult, considerably less villages were reached by the program than had been anticipated.

All the above examples were taken from projects described as participatory. Yet they seem to illustrate the inadequacy of the participatory dimension for understanding what was happening in these PVO programs--both successes and failures. The examples seem to say something about a process that is more accurately described as top-down, or "outside-in"--sometimes enlightened and sometimes not. One student of PVOs used a similar characterization of projects meant to involve local participation which, he said, actually turned out to be "outsiders making decisions for subsequent local acquiescence" (Sommer 1977:74). The same applied to "self-help" activities, this commentator said, which often "use a carrot of substantial outside aid" to gain community participation. Indeed, because "self-help" had so often been used inaccurately to describe such projects, the designers of one particular housing project in Latin America, which was considered to be truly self-helping, felt that they had to describe it as "unaided" self-help.

The above examples, rather than being described as participatory, could be placed in one or more of the following descriptive categories: (1) there was no participation; (2) the community did not want a participatory project, and their preferences were not acceded to

by the PVO; (3) people joined the village group to get access to services, but were not participating in decisionmaking nor interested in doing so; (4) participation lessened the potential impact of the project on the community; (5) participation did not work as well as an enlightened, top-down approach to service provision; (6) the PVO did or promoted what the community did not want; and finally (7) what the community wanted--in contrast to the PVO--was not good for the poor or even for development.

In the above examples, in other words, participation either did not take place, led to bad projects, or lessened the impact of projects on poverty. Instead, top-down interaction between PVOs and communities in projects described as participatory was not unusual, and this was associated with success as well as failure. Though the examples may not be representative of PVO projects, there are enough of them to make one believe that an enlightened, top-down service-delivery model is a useful one to have in mind when doing further evaluations.

#### Participation and project results

Decisionmaking that turns out to be non-participatory may actually be desirable in the case of certain tasks that are less suited than others to participatory decisionmaking. Some technology-intensive activities or tasks may fit this category, where the technology allows little room for choice. Complex tasks, for example, are said



to be better carried out when leadership is strong and somewhat arbitrary. Participatory community efforts, other evaluators have suggested, work less well for ongoing activities than they do for construction. Local individuals in leadership positions, another evaluator found, worked out less well the more technical the project. In general, the necessity of specialized skills to perform an organization's tasks will always involve some degree of incompatibility with participatory processes. A study of participatory organizations in the United States found that no matter how committed the specialists were to the participatory ethos, conflict inevitably emerged between the specialists and the generalists--for example, between physicians and non-physicians in alternative health clinics (Rothschild-Whitt 1976:83). One would expect, then, that certain organizational tasks that are more specialist-dependent might be less compatible with participatory processes.

A good example of the relationship between technology and decisionmaking processes comes from an AID-financed rural electrification project in Andean Bolivia. The PVO contracted by AID to organize the project was committed to the cooperative approach to rural electricity supply, and thus set out to form a cooperative of the various villages falling within the distribution net, with the elders of each village constituting the board of directors. The participating

villages had a long history of rivalry and competition; one constructive form taken by the inter-village rivalry was that one village would try to copy any achievement made by another village, so as not to be outranked by it.

Though village rivalry was constructive for village development, it was problematic when the various villages were put together in a cooperative electrification undertaking. Various technical decisions (like the order in which the villages would be electrified) suddenly assumed dimensions of victory or defeat for each of the "cooperating" villages. When the village representatives did act in unison, it was also to block technically or administratively sound decisions--e.g., objections to the hiring and paying of a reasonable salary to an outside professional as manager, or insistence by the elders that they receive high expense reimbursements for attending board meetings, which they called more frequently than was necessary. As village representatives became more and more obstreperous, the project was delayed. Progress was finally made only when the government electric-power company took over the project and made the technical decisions arbitrarily, leaving the cooperative to settle other less crucial questions.<sup>1</sup>

Many rural electric cooperatives, actually, are better described as successful local enterprises with large doses of public-

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<sup>1</sup>The report of the evaluation team, of which I was a part, did not include this particular example.

sector assistance, which behave more like private companies than participatory ventures. This seems to have been the case in the successful Philippines rural electrification program. Because of the participatory vision of these cooperative rural electrification experiences, however, there is little insight to be gained from the evaluations as to what the elements of the non-participatory success are--or as to when it works and when it does not. One such element, by the way, was suggested in the evaluation of a rural electrification project in Costa Rica. One aspect of the project's success, the evaluator said, was that maintenance of electric facilities is centralized in the hands of the public utility. The evaluator contrasted this situation, and the successful resulting maintenance, to the "current fashion" of claiming that communities do not maintain things because they did not participate in acquiring them. She compared the successful maintenance of the non-participatory rural electric facility to the many cases of unsuccessful maintenance of community facilities like potable water, health clinics, and feeder roads, where community participation in acquiring the facilities had been greater.

Participatory processes may also be less suited for projects involving agricultural production services and subsidies than they

are for the provision of social services--as discussed further in the following chapter. Guy Hunter (1981:24) points out that the attempts to graft agricultural development activities onto traditional local mechanisms for handling village affairs have not been very successful. Village councils, he says, may indeed be genuinely democratic in making decisions about sanitation, markets, the use of wells, and in other areas of conflict resolution. But it is difficult to graft onto these councils activities that are accompanied by monetary benefits and subsidies, which are non-traditional and a cause of jealousies and power conflicts. Here is additional reason, then, for evaluating participatory approaches according to their suitability for the task at hand.

If participation is considered to be the sine qua non of the PVO style, then lessons like those of the cases discussed above may go unnoticed. It may be difficult for an evaluator to understand the cases where, because of the nature of the task, participatory processes made the project problematic or, conversely, where projects did better because decisionmaking was arbitrary. The PVO, for example, may be less interested in whether a community decided to initiate an agricultural extension or a health program than it is in the way the decision was made. Yet if one type of project works better with participatory action than another--or if the PVO is better at assisting in one area than another--then the type of activity chosen is relevant

to the success of the undertaking. Strong commitment to open-ended processes of decisionmaking, in sum, may make it difficult to think about evaluation questions of this nature.

#### When elites decide

The third and final category of "participatory" projects is that where community activities are characterized by non-representative decision-making by local elites. The latter are sometimes not indigenous, as with some resident religious missionaries, parish priests and pastors. The Development Alternatives, Inc., evaluation of PVO projects in Kenya and Niger, for example, noted that one element of project success was that local staff worked directly with the local power structure, whether in the form of government or traditional groups. An evaluation of a successful community development program in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip noted that the PVO worked with community associations composed exclusively of professional elites. A PVO responsible for a community health program in Ecuador itself chose the local people who would participate. An evaluation of various PVO projects in Africa noted that most PVOs depended on local parishes or other village-level authorities to organize the project.

For many projects, foreign missionaries or other religious figures were the local contact points for organizing the community. Local workers for a community health project in Ecuador were chosen by local Protestant evangelical associations. An evaluation of PVO

projects in Latin America noted that most of the persons working in the projects at the local level were priests, pastors or catechists (The study also noted that no signs of religious discrimination could be detected in the access of villagers to project benefits.) An agricultural polytechnical project in Kenya was run by church members.

Control by local elites or indigenous religious groups is often associated with project success. After all, Protestant and Catholic church groups are noted in many parts of rural Africa for having been the only providers of health or education services for some time, or for doing a better job at it than the public sector.<sup>1</sup> (In the case of education, they frequently limited access to believers.) The point I am making here, however, is that these religious ventures often come closer to the service-delivery model than to participation, and the successful cases should be understood as such. As an OECD study noted, "churches and parishes represent a valuable network especially for rural, small, low-cost and participatory projects, notwithstanding the occasional authoritarian features of this type of organization."

In some cases, control over decisions by religious leaders in a community will be compatible with the growth of representative institutions--in other cases, not. As an example of a less compatible

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<sup>1</sup> A study covering the 1969-1973 period found that church organizations provided about 20% of the total hospital and maternity beds in all of Africa.

case, the evaluation of a community health project in Ecuador reported that local evangelical associations, through which the project worked, tried to replace existing indigenous organizations in two provinces. From my own experience in Northeast Brazil, parish priests have often discredited the emergence of genuine leadership among peasants because of the threat that this leadership represented to their power in the community.<sup>1</sup> In the same area of Brazil, Protestant pastors have taken a stance against peasant organizing to resist illegal behavior of large landowners--such as illegal eviction of tenants, expulsion of peasants with squatters' rights by landgrabbers, etc. Even when such activities have been supported by Catholic parish priests, Protestant pastors have advised their communities that they will get their land "only in heaven."

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<sup>1</sup>Recently, for example, when genuine peasant leaders for the first time became candidates for office in local rural unions, some parish priests campaigned against them, advising other peasants not to vote for them because they were not married in the Church, drank alcohol or smoked marijuana. (All three "failings" are not unusual among peasants, including respected elders, in the area where this occurred.) When the discrediting campaigns of these priests were successful, the result was the election of less committed and less representative union officials. Some of these priests, interestingly, were of the Liberation persuasion; they were encouraging peasants with squatters' rights, for example, to organize and resist land invasions. Though they were acting on the side of the poor on this particular issue, then, they at the same time used their power in the community to prevent truly participatory processes and representative leadership from evolving.

The indigenous peasant organizing and leadership of the Brazil examples is the kind of participatory process that has often led to the bargaining power necessary to negotiate widespread improvements in the conditions of the poor. Thus the discouraging of this kind of group formation clearly represents a setback for the objectives espoused by PVOs. Though the control of projects by local religious figures may often result in well-functioning services and improvements in the status of the poor, in sum, the evaluator should also be alert to the fact that such control may also go along with the stifling of genuinely representative institutions.

#### Benefits under elite control

Control of community projects by local elites does not always mean that benefits go mainly to elites. A benefit distribution that is skewed toward elites, however, will usually be a sign of elite control. The few impressions of benefit distribution reported in the PVO evaluations suggest that at least some projects are of benefit mainly to the better-off in the communities they serve--as illustrated by the examples presented below. Until further evaluation work is done, one can assume that other projects supplying goods and services that can be appropriated by elites would also display the same benefit distribution.

A community development project in South Korea reached only the top 5% of the rural population--i.e., those who owned more than two hectares of land. The average size of farms served by a



livestock project in El Salvador was almost three times larger than the average farm in the project area--16.5 hectares vs. six hectares. Cattle holdings on the participating farms in this project averaged 30 head per farm, again placing these farmers in the middle and upper ranges of the income distribution in rural El Salvador, where the large majority of the population is without livestock herds of this size. A community development project in Honduras provided fishponds and Lorena stoves to community participants, none of whom were among the poorer members of the community. The above-cited South Korea project reported that the best of the milk cows supplied by the project were given to village leaders in order to ensure their participation in the project. For the same reason, house repair materials and assistance were provided first to the leaders. Similarly, one PVO specializes in providing quality livestock to better-off farmers, though with the proviso that the offspring of these animals be given to poorer farmers (Sommer 1977:59). (It is not clear from the evaluations whether this cooptation tactic of the last two examples actually paid off in terms of leader commitment to the program, and whether the poorer community members ultimately received their cows, their house repairs, and their livestock offspring. This issue is discussed further below.)

Water projects--both irrigation and potable--seemed particularly vulnerable to benefit distributions skewed toward the elites. In

Bangladesh, most of the tubewells provided by a PVO project were situated so as to benefit the wealthier villagers. The water development activities of the community development program of an Indian PVO were criticized for benefiting mainly the larger farmers (Coombs 1981:47). A potable water project in Korea benefited mainly the wealthy members of the communities served, with only 20% of the households obtaining connections. A similar project by the same PVO in Kenya also showed the main beneficiaries to be better off, partly because of a government policy to increase water revenues by minimizing the number of communal water points (where charges were not levied) and maximizing the number of individual household connections (4:9). In Colombia, finally, a community development project provided latrines and individual household connections for water to the better-off members of the community, reaching 15% and 20% respectively, of the households. These results are consistent with studies of the benefit distributions of public-sector water and sanitation programs in third-world countries, which show only 14% of the benefits going to those in absolute poverty (Burki 1981:177).

Though the skewed benefit distributions of these examples are not the inevitable outcome of elite control of decisionmaking, it is not unreasonable to interpret such outcomes as signs of elite control. If decisionmaking were more participatory, that is, the poor would not choose project goods that--like the Lorena stoves,

the fishponds, the individual water connections--were beyond their reach. Many PVO projects, in sum, fall into my third category of non-participatory decisionmaking by local elites. What is really happening in these cases is that the PVO is consulting with and bringing into the decisionmaking process the most powerful in the communities where it will operate. This way of proceeding is, as the PVOs claim, significantly different than what large donors usually do. But the process can be called participatory only with respect to the PVO itself, which is allowing community leaders to participate in its project design and implementation work. It is not participatory with respect to the population of the community or region in which the program takes place.

#### The decentralization of elite influence

The organization and involvement of local elites in decisionmaking by PVOs is in some ways analogous to the way central and state governments consult with and yield to powerful politicians in the course of planning their development projects. In terms of this analogy, it is not that PVOs work "bottom-up" in contrast to the "top-down" style of governments; rather, it is that the top-down style--where development projects are influenced by national and regional elites--brings less benefits to the poor when practiced at higher as opposed to lower political levels. Control by elites at local levels, that is, may be more compatible with certain beneficial outcomes for the poor

than control at higher levels. Community-level elites, for example, can be mobilized to contribute to local-level projects in various forms, thus taking considerable administrative and financial burden off the outside agency. This is because many such projects are made available to local elites only if they will make a contribution in organizing the project or in materials and cash. The PVO-elite interaction, then, can be seen as eliciting organizational and financial contributions to development projects from elites in a way that interactions between national-level government and elites do not. In this sense, the PVO is doing something that the government is not able to do: mobilizing local-level contributions or "self-taxing" for development projects.

The ability of the PVO to elicit contributions from local elites, of course, is contingent upon the government's not making it easier by suddenly arriving in the communities with services and structures "for free." This problem is not an uncommon one in the history of PVO efforts. The evaluation of the South Korea community development project reported that village leaders could not be induced to participate in the PVO effort because they were already involved in a larger, more sweeping government program for providing development goods to communities. The Mexican Rural Development Foundation, an IAF-supported indigenous PVO that has provided agricultural credit and technical assistance to small peasant farmers, is now losing

many of its participants to the public sector, which has recently embarked on a massive campaign to provide these inputs to peasant farmers without requiring that they first organize. In a similar way, an AID-funded indigenous PVO in Nicaragua, which for years had operated alone in certain parts of the countryside, is now being overshadowed by the new, comprehensive program of public-sector assistance to the rural sector in that country. I comment on the implications of these government moves into "PVO territory" in a later section.

The other distinguishing characteristic of the PVO-elite interaction, as opposed to that between governments and their elites, is that the former interaction takes place right where the project is and involves those who will benefit directly. Both PVO and local elites are constantly on the scene of the project, and their interaction revolves around all its details. This contrasts with the more general, removed nature of the government-elite interaction that precedes the implementation of larger development projects. The project-specific interaction between PVOs and local elites results in projects getting molded to local ways of doing things in a way that does not happen with the more centralized projects, and their government-elite interactions. A more accurate description of what makes some PVO projects special, then, would be that they are decentralized, rather than participatory.

### Harmony and conflict among the classes

If it is true that many PVO projects involve interactions with local elites rather than participation, then this breaks the causal link in the PVO logic between participation and reaching the poor. If the "participatory process" is limited to elites, the results may or may not benefit the poor, and the decisionmaking process is definitely not representative. Local elites may take the interests of the poor into account or help them inadvertently in the course of helping themselves, but the poor are not represented in their decisionmaking.

What does it mean for the distribution of benefits if decisions are made mainly by local elites in a particular project? Regardless of the findings on participation, in other words, what does the project show on benefit distribution? Some tasks and activities may not be as easily appropriated by individuals as others, in which case the benefit distribution will be less vulnerable to elite control. The services of roads, churches and soccer fields, for example, will not be denied to the poor. This is because these services are indivisible, or are public goods (use by one person does not leave less left over for the rest), or because it is not customary to limit access to these particular facilities. These characteristics are distinctly different from goods and services like household water connections, livestock, individual fish ponds, agricultural credit, fertilizers and other

inputs--all of which are divisible, are used mainly at an individual level, and are provided in scarce supply (use by some leaves less or none left over for the others). One would expect to find less equitable benefit distributions when local elites were in charge of these latter types of activities, than in the case of the less divisible, more public-goods type services.<sup>1</sup> If it is difficult to understand that decisionmaking is indeed elitist rather than participatory in a particular project, then it will also be difficult to take the next step and ask the above questions, and move on to identify the "elite-proof" activities.

In many cases, the interests of the elites and the poor will be in conflict. Local landowner-leaders, for example, are often against projects that increase the availability of land and credit to the landless and near-landless, because this may lead to an increase in the agricultural wage; with their new access to land or credit, the landless withdraw their labor from the landowners in order to work more time on their own new or rented plots. The attitude of village elites reported in one PVO evaluation expresses this conflict of interest: the poor were necessary to have around for manual labor, the village elites said, but their wages were "outrageously" high. Another example of a conflict of interest between elites and poor involves PVO projects providing large livestock or assistance to livestock production. Local elites will benefit from this assistance

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<sup>1</sup> A similar argument is elaborated in Leonard & Marshall (1981), Tandler (1981), and Uphoff (1980).

and the poor majority will be harmed if the programs result in a substitution of cropland by pasture, eviction of cropping tenants, and decreases in the agricultural wage resulting from decreased needs for labor in livestock. All these problems are a common outcome of assistance and subsidies for large livestock. (Assistance for small livestock, among whose owners the poor are more proportionately represented, is infrequent among the programs of PVOs as well as of large donors.)

In other types of projects, elite decisions in their own self-interest may not harm the poor but also will not help them. Examples are project goods and services that can be appropriated by individuals, such as fertilizer and seeds, individual water or electricity connections, or assistance for the production of goods that the poor usually cannot afford to produce--citrus trees and other perennial crops requiring investment (vs. annual crops), agriculture as opposed to handicrafts, large livestock as opposed to small livestock. In these cases of conflict of interest, there is no reason to assume that community decisions will be made in favor of the poor and against the elites, unless the poor are strongly represented. As the evaluator of the South Korea community development program commented, there was no possibility of trickle-down from the elites assisted by the project to the poor "because of class conflict." Because communities are often portrayed in PVO project descriptions and



evaluations as internally harmonious and without potential for class conflict, this may have made it easier to assume that decisionmaking by village elites was the same as, and had the same distributional results as, participation.

Although elite control of local projects may not always be the best thing for the poor, and should not be confused with representative decisionmaking, such control cannot for this reason be rejected outright. There are probably few other ways of organizing projects, that is, if one is to work at the local level. As one evaluator pointed out, after noting that project leaders were local elites like teachers or mayors, local leaders were extremely effective in getting community programs to be executed in the first place. Elite leadership of community programs for the poor, moreover, is not characteristic only of PVO or third-world projects. The community organizations and alternative groups that flourished under the U.S. poverty program in the U.S. tended to be run by those who were better educated and from a higher class background than the groups they represented (Perlman 1976:11).

In contrast to the conflict-of-interest situations described above, there are certain types of projects for which, if the elites act out of their own self-interest, the poor will also benefit. A clear-cut example would be programs to eradicate contagious diseases in humans or livestock. If the elites vaccinate only themselves

or their animals, they will still be vulnerable to the contagion, and thus it will be to their interest for all to be vaccinated. (Some PVOs have made major contributions in the eradication of contagious diseases. The nature of the task, making it desirable for elites to assure the protection of all, contributed toward making the wide coverage of this PVO contribution possible.) Other, less clear-cut examples of self-interested elite projects that can benefit the poor are social services like health, education, and community water taps (vs. individual connections)--all of which are usually provided to the whole community and not just a few. The poor may benefit also, even if elites are acting out of self-interest, because of a patron-client tradition: elites may sponsor a health project because they expect it to relieve them of patron-client obligations to take care of the health expenditures of certain poor families.

Once it is recognized that local decisionmaking is in the control of the few rather than the many, then certain questions are opened up for evaluation. Are there ways of making decisionmaking more participatory?<sup>1</sup> What are the types of projects and project environments for which truly participatory processes are feasible and also produce good results? In the cases of local-elite

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<sup>1</sup>One evaluation reported that a "disproportionate influence" on project decisionmaking by "town elites" was reduced after an evaluation team pointed this out. What was the mechanism by which elite control was successfully reduced in this case? What were the signs of it having been reduced?

decisionmaking, what types of projects result in benefits for the poor even if they have no influence on decisions? What types of projects, in this situation, have no impact on the poor, or are to their detriment? Finally, might there be situations where an elite-excluding, rather than community-wide, approach would result in more participation and benefits to the poor? This would be true of a class-based organization of the poor like a labor union, a tenants' union, or a womens' organization, from which local elites would be "naturally" excluded and where it would be desirable not to include community leadership. Hunter (1981:28) suggests that this approach to the poor is preferable to community-wide large cooperatives or elected councils. The latter, he says, "will recapitulate the social hierarchy," whereas direct contact with the poor is likely to be most effective in several separate functions like small farms, artisan work, women's needs, irrigation groups.

Under what conditions could elites be bypassed in projects, as occurs in the case of class-based organizations, while at the same time effective leadership was not sacrificed? Can one achieve this by promoting activities that are definitely not of interest to the elites? This actually took place, inadvertently, in the Korea community development project where village leaders were not interested in participating because they were too busy with a government-sponsored community program. As a result, the PVO had no choice but to

work with a younger, less prestigious group of villagers who, it turned out, were more responsive than the established leaders. A similar sequence of events took place in a community development project in Guatemala, where the influential and wealthy elders of the villages were not interested in collective efforts in the community because of their own recent and substantial economic progress. The PVO also found, as in the Korea example, that many of the young men were active and interested, even those who were sons of the uninterested elders.<sup>1</sup>

These particular situations, with elites too preoccupied with other activities, are probably not uncommon, especially in the less remote areas. A study of settlement patterns in Latin America, for example, reported that the widespread desertion of small county seats by the local upper class, who left for the cities, was associated with a more dynamic and innovating spirit among the left-behind lower class that came to dominate, by default, these abandoned small towns (Wolfe 1966:24). Under certain conditions, then, PVOs might view elite disinterest as presenting an opportunity to reach the truly poor in an area, instead of trying to convince uninterested elites to participate in community projects, as happened in Korea and Guatemala cases. Again, looking for and seeing such opportunities requires

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<sup>1</sup>Kusterer (1981:37). The PVO was the Uleu Foundation, an offshoot of the Berhorst Clinic.

an understanding of the conflicts of interest, as well as the potential harmony, that exist in most communities.

Is voluntary labor participatory?

The way in which communities finance some of their PVO-assisted projects is another area in which the participatory label obscures what is happening. When the community's main contribution toward financing a project is voluntary labor, this means that the burden of the financing will often be distributed regressively. If each community member must supply an equal number of days of work, as is often the rule, the income foregone by doing this volunteer work represents a larger proportion of income of the poorest than of the better-off. Better-off community members, moreover, can often make their labor contribution in cash, paying the prevailing daily wage for agricultural labor in the area; this possibility is not a real one for the poorest--i.e., those who make no more than the prevailing wage.

In some community projects, a substantial portion of the community's contribution will be in the form of equipment and materials--cement, the services of a tractor, etc. The evaluation of a group of African projects reported that local resource commitment was in the form of equipment and materials. A community development project in Colombia showed an "impressive" contribution of materials, as well as labor. In Senegal, village elites contributed to

the construction of health huts with cash to buy doors, paint, extra cement and iron sheets for roofing, in addition to the voluntary construction labor of village youth. In these cases, in contrast to that of voluntary labor, the better-off persons of the community tend to bear proportionally greater responsibility because they either own the materials themselves, or have the cash or connections to acquire them. Unlike labor, cash and materials cannot be appropriated from the poor because they do not have them. Local leaders often volunteer to bear this greater proportional contribution to the project because there may be no other way to come by the materials and because they reap significant income and status rewards from contributing. In many cases, then, the use of voluntary labor is better characterized as a regressive or exploitative system of project financing rather than as participatory.

That voluntary labor was not participatory was the complaint made by the poorer members of the communities served by a community development project in South Korea. They were forced to "volunteer" without pay, they complained, for works like irrigation channels that benefited mainly the better-off farmers. Fragmentary evidence from other evaluations also suggests that voluntary labor works a hardship on the poor. A PVO-assisted community health project in Bolivia could not find volunteer community health workers because most people were in "debt peonage"--their labor already committed

to paying off debts to a landowner-merchant. It was therefore not possible to do a health program in that area, the PVO concluded, unless an agrarian reform abolishing debt peonage were enacted. A potable water project in Guatemala found that "voluntary" labor was "more forthcoming when food was offered in exchange for work." Similarly, another evaluation suggested that sufficient voluntary labor for a PVO-sponsored tree planting project in Africa would be forthcoming only if food-for-work commodities were supplied in exchange for labor. In a flood control project evaluated in the same study, it was noted that voluntary labor had been considered "impractical" because of economic hardship following a drought. In a community development project in Sri Lanka, finally, it was found that mothers had not been as active as was hoped in preparation of a midday meal for children because they were resentful that health auxiliaries were paid to work whereas they, the mothers, were not.

The common theme of these examples is that the poor will often work on community projects only for wages, and that working without wages imposes a severe hardship on them. In many cases, in other words, the poor will not work for free on community projects unless they are forced to by local powerholders in accordance with longstanding custom. In the Middle East, as one evaluator of a participatory project reported, voluntary labor does not bypass traditional patterns of leadership and autocratic decisionmaking,

but instead reinforces them,                      Similarly, in many Indian areas of Middle America and the Andean countries, the poor are so uninterested in working voluntarily on community undertakings that the task of calling up workers for unpaid labor--a task of the local municipio (county) representative--is considered a "distasteful job" (Wolfe 1966:22). Indeed, for this reason, the post of municipio representative has sometimes had to be forced upon unwilling candidates, under threat of fine or imprisonment. These candidates, in fact, were sometimes deliberately chosen by municipio authorities as scapegoats.

It may be inaccurate, in sum, to describe voluntary labor as participatory, let alone to call it voluntary. It is also a contradiction in terms to say that voluntary labor can be "elicited" by compensating laborers with food--as reported in the Guatemala and Kenya-Niger cases cited above. A more accurate recasting of the above statements would be to say that a project relied on long-standing autocratic customs for labor recruitment, which bore proportionally heavier on the poorer members of the community; or that poor members of the community were not interested in volunteering their labor to community projects at all, but did respond enthusiastically to opportunities for paid employment (food is a form of wage). In either case, what was making the projects work was autocratic community customs or the offering of employment to the poor by the project--neither of which involve participation, truly voluntary labor or, when labor was not paid, equitable financing burdens.



As long as voluntary labor (or labor paid with food) is misspecified as participatory, it will be difficult for evaluators to see through to the important questions regarding this phenomenon. Might community projects that require large proportions of materials and equipment, in relation to labor, result in an automatic and salutary shifting of the financing burden to better-off members of the community? What types of projects fit these requirements? Might matching-fund arrangements between the public sector or the PVO and the communities be set up so as to pay for labor costs, requiring the community to provide its share in equipment and materials, thereby encouraging a more proportional or progressive financing burden?

Another series of questions relates to the desirability of voluntary labor. Would the poor be more benefited by working in projects for which their labor was paid? In the Bolivian debt peonage example above, would not the poor have been more benefited if the program had paid the community health workers and provided a health program to the community, in contrast to the PVO's decision that without volunteers and an agrarian reform, it was not worth working there? Does the Bolivian example, along with the others above, suggest that voluntary labor is a possibility only in better-off communities? Does this mean that, as in the Bolivian case, PVOs can do community development only if they avoid the poorest communities?--a conclusion, by the way, reached by one PVO evaluator,

Though community self-help may produce successful projects, in sum, that does not necessarily mean that they are also participatory or equitable. Indeed, one might find less voluntary labor in transitional or modernizing communities where, because of the breakdown of feudal patron-client relationships, traditions of forced recruitment of labor no longer prevailed. I found this to be the case in the newer, more egalitarian communities of Brazil's frontier, where local merchants complained that they could only get the poorer community members to work on local feeder roads by paying them out of their (the merchants') own pockets. The feeder roads, in other words, would increase these merchants' income enough that it was worth their while to pay for community labor. From the point of view of those concerned for the poor, is this not a more desirable approach to community projects? In some countries, then, it might be reasonable to start with the assumption that the presence of voluntary labor is a likely sign of autocratic, and not representative, community decisionmaking.

All this is not to say that PVOs must put an end to reliance on voluntary labor, or that such projects are bad. It does say, however, that some projects with voluntary labor probably cannot be characterized as participatory. In some cases, the only choice open to a community may be a project with forced labor or no project at all. One might feel more comfortable about supporting such a project if it was a type that was particularly beneficial to the

poor--e.g., construction of a rural health clinic vs. the digging of irrigation channels--or if cofinancing arrangements could be set up for paying labor. Alternatively, one might want to support only those self-help community projects with high materials-equipment components, and their correspondingly less regressive financing burdens.

### III - Are the Poorest Unreachable?

Though PVOs and evaluations of them sometimes characterize the poorest as an unreachable and "hard-core" minority, these persons often represent a majority or a large minority of the rural inhabitants of many countries. Though the beneficiaries of some projects were poor, as seen in the last chapter, they were still in the upper 10% or 20% of the income distribution. To illustrate the point further, I present a few examples of how large the excluded poorest group would be if projects worked at a certain minimum cutoff point. In the Daule area of Ecuador, if one worked with small farmers owning land parcels of between two and five hectares one would be reaching 28% of total parcels but excluding 51% of the parcels, which are less than two hectares. In Ecuador in general, if one worked with farm families working plots any larger than six hectares, one would be excluding 67% of the families who work less than six hectares (71:5, Annex 4, p. 1). If one worked with farmers holding between three and eight acres on the Usanga Plain of Tanzania, one would be reaching 47% of the families, but at the same time excluding the 40% of families who work less than two acres (Castro et al 1981:403). In India, if one worked with farmers working between 2.5 and 5 acres one would be reaching 28% of the holdings but excluding the 51% of the holdings that are less than 2.5 acres (Singh 1979:17); similarly

in Bangladesh, where if one worked with farmers holding between 2.5 and 7.5 acres, one would be reaching 35% of the population but excluding the 57% with less than 2.5 acres (p. 16). In all these cases, of course, the excluded share of the poorest in the income distribution would be increased by the number of those who were landless. The poorest who are unreached by many projects, in sum, are in no way an insignificant minority. In this chapter, I would like to suggest why they have come to be characterized as unreachable by some PVOs, and to propose another way of thinking about PVOs and the poorest.

That the poor are difficult for PVOs to reach has to do, in part, with certain aspects of PVOs, AID, and the types of projects they do--and not only, therefore, with the nature of poverty itself. One factor within PVO or AID control, for example, has already been discussed: certain project styles give control to local elites over decisions about what kinds of activities the communities will organize around--resulting, frequently, in the kinds of projects that elites are in a better position to benefit from. In these cases, a project style that gives control to the poorest instead of elites might result in more poor-appropriate activities. The same result could also be accomplished by "top-down" interventions of the PVO, supporting only those types of elite-determined activities that have benefit distributions known to favor the poor.

Three other aspects of PVOs have contributed toward making the poor seem more unreachable than they might actually be. They all are associated with PVO attempts to evolve from relief agencies into development agencies. I treat these three aspects in the following three sections.

#### From relief to development

For various reasons, partly the long-term decline in private contributions to the U.S. voluntary sector, many PVOs have reoriented themselves toward development work during the 1970s, in contrast to relief. This has qualified them to be seen by donors as alternative conduits for development assistance--particularly for projects directed at the poor. Throughout the 1970s, AID has had the explicit goal of encouraging PVOs to move out of relief and into development, and has provided funding and assistance to PVOs so as to build and strengthen their capacity in this new area. As part of this transformation, the "relief" outlook and the activities associated with it underwent a certain discrediting; they were considered out of date and too focused on activities with only short-lived effects on poverty.

As part of the concern for having more lasting impacts, some PVOs turned toward assisting income-earning activities, particularly in agriculture. Yet the agricultural and other income-earning activities of PVOs seem to suffer more than their other projects from a lack

of professional expertise, as noted by at least three evaluators (102:27, 135a:3, Hunter 1981:26). The more generalist background of PVO staffs and the emphasis on volunteerism, that is, may be more compatible with programs in the social sectors than in the income-earning ones. The move by some PVOs into income-earning activities and particularly agriculture, then, may be making it more difficult for them to do well.

If not designed appropriately, projects focused on agriculture are particularly vulnerable to appropriation of benefits by elites, as the experience of large donors has shown. This happens because agricultural services and inputs are divisible and provided in short supply, thus pitting the elites against the poor in direct competition for these goods. The administration of social services in rural areas, in contrast, does not place village leadership into such direct competition with the poor (Hunter 1981:24). Agricultural activities also tend to bypass the poorest to the extent that they do not possess the means of production necessary to participate--i.e., land. In addition, the services and subsidies supplied by agricultural projects--tractors, large livestock, irrigation pumps, long-maturing investments such as citrus trees and other perennials--are often suited only to better-off farmers. The health and other projects characteristic of the relief days, in contrast, may have less "natural" exclusion of the poor built into them because they provide more indivisible or collective goods.

An interesting example of the different distributional impacts of collective (or indivisible) vs. non-collective projects comes from the history of irrigation projects in India. Bardhan (1981:4) reports that before older irrigation systems were replaced by tubewells owned by individual farmers, village leadership had a personal interest in contributing to the maintenance of the irrigation canals, which redounded to the benefit of all farmers. With the advent of tubewells, however, it was possible for farmers to provide themselves individually with irrigation water, at least those farmers well off enough to invest in their own tubewells. This meant that the village leadership, made up of the better-off farmers who were acquiring the tubewells, no longer were interested in contributing to the maintenance of the old irrigation channels. The net effect of this change was to damage the poorer farmers who could not afford to invest in their own tubewells, were still dependent on the communal system, and therefore suffered losses due to the declining maintenance of that system. The evolution of technology, then, had transformed irrigation water from a collective to an individual good, with adverse effects on the poor because of the corresponding loss of leadership interest in contributing to the collective good. The example also illustrates the importance to project evaluators of ascertaining the distributional implications inherent in the technologies and activities of a project, in order to help project designers make better choices.



An evaluation of a community development project in Bangladesh illustrates the difficulties of bringing agriculture projects to the poor. It was harder to find ways of helping the landless in agriculture, the evaluator reported, than in health and sanitation. That is, agricultural credit was not available for landless tenants, the PVO had less successful relationships with the relevant government entities in agriculture than in health and sanitation, and it was more difficult in the agricultural ministries to get the specialists to give service to the poor. By "graduating" from relief to development, then, this PVO may have inadvertently graduated from the poorest to the not-so-poor. This may be another reason why some PVOs now tend to think of the poorest as unreachable.

Income-earning projects, of course, do not have to exclude the poorest. Large assetholdings like land are not required in many non-agricultural production activities, which often account for a large percentage of the income of the poorest farm households (Chuta & Liedholm 1979:14). In many areas, the poorest are more proportionately represented or more readily assisted in activities like small trading, crafts, fishing, small livestock, women-controlled production, charcoal making, peddling, and a variety of gathering or extractive activities not requiring land ownership. Even in agriculture, there are certain project activities that will be particularly appropriate to the poorest and less suited to appropriation by elites. Some examples are land titling

assistance, provision of subsidized inputs and credit to non-landowner farmers, technical assistance and subsidies to female-controlled agricultural activities, and emphasis on low-status crops and crop varieties.

A program of credit and technical assistance to small enterprises in Botswana offers an example of an opportunity for targeting assistance for non-agricultural income-earning activities on the poor. The evaluator reported that the project ended up being of most assistance to enterprises owned by women, who were of lower socio-economic status than owners of the male-headed enterprises. The male businessmen were involved in other activities that were considered more prestigious than their small businesses--mainly, cattle-raising, commercial farming and civil service. They were not interested in improving the management of their low-status small businesses, therefore, and were not responsive to or interested in the PVO's technical assistance. The women, in contrast, had no other income-earning activities, and were not well-off enough to be affected by the negative status connotations of caring about one's small business. Though the evaluator looked at the male disinterest as a problem, recommending that the PVO attempt to change the male attitudes, the disinterest could instead be looked at as an excellent opportunity for targeting: the low-status connotations of small business would assure that assistance in this area would reach mainly low-status persons--i.e., the poorest.

Taking advantage of social stigma as an opportunity for improved targeting on the poor has been suggested on other occasions. In a World Food Program report (1980:9) on projects for women, Dixon noted that projects promoting increased female enrollments in secondary schools or vocational training programs tended to draw students from more prosperous groups. This was not true of programs seeking to employ women in public works construction projects, because of the social stigma of such work. For the very poor, "the lack of opportunity for work is far more constricting than are cultural values."

Another example of an opportunity to target income-earning assistance for agriculture on the poorest can be found in a discussion of the Indian milk and oilseed-growers' cooperatives. Evaluators of the milk cooperative program found that households with only one milk animal and no land benefited more from membership, in terms of proportional income increases, than members with land and more than one animal. Focusing some programs or activities on landless owners of a milk animal, then, would result in automatic targeting on the poorest. The same evaluation also compared the distributional characteristics of cooperatives in milk and oilseed production. Whereas oilseed production requires landownership, milk production does not. If one wanted to target benefits in this particular region on the poor, then, one might direct project activities to milk production rather than oilseed production.

Even within the oilseed growers' project, there were opportunities to reach the poorest that were not being used. For various reasons, the growers' societies excluded agricultural laborers, sharecroppers, and female heads of household. The evaluators suggested that the societies could offer a kind of "associate status" to laborers, who were paid in kind at harvest, so that they might gain the benefits of marketing their in-kind payments through the cooperative's marketing channels. Associate status was also recommended for landless residents so that they might benefit from the favorable prices of commodities offered by the cooperative store. Another example of opportunities for targeting is presented in the following section.

The new development focus on income-earning activities, in sum, is a commendable transition away from the perception of the poor as fit only for charity. At the same time, this attempt to treat the poor as producers has sometimes resulted in the inadvertent exclusion of the poorest from the new production-oriented projects--leading full circle back to a perception of the poorest as unreachable. The dilemma can be partly resolved by a greater awareness of the "trickle-up" dangers inherent in projects involving income-earning and agriculture. With some extra thought and sensitivity to these dangers, as suggested above, PVOs (and large donors) will find that the poorest are not so unreachable.

Relief, charity and "The Woman Question"

Many PVOs started as relief and charity operations, and some still continue to do considerable work in this area. The welfare way of thinking about the poor may be more difficult to shake off, as the PVOs become more "developmental," than the welfare techniques themselves. Project activities involving women are a good example. From my reading of the PVO evaluations, the PVOs seem to have been as slow as the large donors in focusing on women as a poverty group (women-headed households being over-represented among the poorest), in being concerned about the exclusion of women from income-generating projects, particularly in agriculture, and in realizing that projects typically engage with women mainly as homemakers rather than as income-earners. AID-financed PVOs, according to one commentator, have not gone much beyond rhetoric on the matter of women.

As in the case of the large donors, much of the women-related PVO activity involves the teaching of sewing and cooking and other activities, like nutrition education, that enhance the woman's role as homemaker but not as income-earner. Women's programs in home economics, as one commentator on PVO projects reports, are "attractive and useful to the elite women of the community, but [are] irrelevant for the poor ones, whose first need is to earn some income" (Coombs 1981:15). Handicraft projects for women, moreover, typically finance crafts that are time consuming, provide little income, and are not

easily upgradable to yield higher prices (Dhamija 1981:2). Though handicraft projects are the typical choice for women's projects, handicrafts often represent a more complicated way of generating income than other choices, such as food processing for local markets (Ibid., p. 15).

There are exceptions, of course, to the inadequacies cited above, like a successful crafts production and marketing project in Haiti. But the exceptions are strangely few in number for a group of organizations that has had more involvement with women over the last two decades--as widows, "unwed mothers" and undernourished mothers--than have the large donors. That PVOs have a long history of thinking about the poorest and women in terms of charity and dependency may have contributed to this slowness to think about women as income-earners and contributors to output.<sup>1</sup>

The case of PVO and donor promotion of kitchen gardens illustrates the difficulty experienced by PVOs, along with governments and donors, in viewing women as having productive potential. The closest that most projects come to recognizing the productive role of women in agriculture is the promotion of kitchen gardens, a proverbial feature of many PVO and other projects. These kitchen gardens appear as aspects of nutrition, and not agricultural, programs. The gardens,

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<sup>1</sup>This point has also been made by Germain (1976-77).

moreover, never elicit the funding, the subsidized inputs, the technical assistance or the research interest that the agricultural programs do. In those cases where resources are devoted to kitchen gardens, they are channeled through the male members of the family--resulting, in at least one documented case, in project failure (Pierce Colfer 1981:9).

The lack of interest in the kitchen garden as agricultural production is remarkable. Kitchen gardens, though usually portrayed as "hobbies" of the lady of the house, often make significant contributions to household income. Because they are adjacent to the house, they receive more intensive care and fertilization (in the form of household refuse and small-livestock droppings) than the field crops; they thus show higher per-acre yields for crops grown also in the field, and are often more economically appropriate than the field for cultivation of high-value and high-cost (in terms of labor, management and inputs) crops. In many countries, moreover, kitchen gardens are the place where experimentation takes place with new seeds, new inputs and new planting practices.<sup>1</sup> Farmers may sometimes not even try out these new things in the field crops until they have been proven in the kitchen gardens. One would think, therefore, that kitchen gardens and the women who control them would be a focal

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<sup>1</sup>Vermeer (n.d.) reports on this phenomenon in Nigeria, and Johnson (1972) cites evidence from New Guinea, Laos, and the Philippines. I have also observed this phenomenon in my work in Northeast Brazil.

point for introducing improved agricultural inputs and practices. Agricultural production projects, however, routinely attempt to introduce new inputs and practices only through the field crops and the men who control them.

Because kitchen gardens are traditionally under the control of women, finally, they are particularly appropriate as targeted income-earning projects for the poor. Since so many PVO activities with women include kitchen gardens--mainly for nutritional objectives--they should be paid particular attention in evaluations. Are there cases where kitchen garden promotion did lead to significant increases in household income? What made these cases different? Were there any cases of assistance for kitchen gardens that involved significant funding for inputs, credit, or agricultural extension? How did this come about?

#### The specialist and the generalist

The transformation of PVOs from relief and welfare to development agencies has meant, for some PVOs, the taking on of more community needs than might have been done in the past. If a PVO had worked only in health, for example, then it was encouraged (partly by AID) to become more "developmental" by diversifying into other areas like agricultural assistance, education, small public works projects, etc.--to become, in other words, a mini-development agency. In certain ways, this multi-component or "integrated" vision of development



and development projects looks similar to the emphasis of the large donors on integrated rural development projects, a result of the shift of development assistance toward the poor during the 1970s. The broadness of the new developmental approach of some PVOs may be diminishing their ability to do effective projects and reach the poorest. A few cases from the PVO evaluations illustrate the point.

An evaluation of a community development project in Yemen noted that the PVO had been successful in water resource development projects, which were of high priority to local leaders. But the commitment of the PVO to the integrated approach, it was reported, slowed down the further progress to be made in water. The same evaluator reported that it was difficult for PVO staffers, who were experienced or trained in sector-specific work, to accept and work effectively under an approach that sought to do a little bit in each area. The integrated approach, moreover, was said to be adhered to strongly by PVO management without regard to "pragmatic considerations" of what the PVO could actually deliver. The PVO's "unyielding commitment" to the integrated method created confusion on the staff, it was said, and raised unsustainable expectations in the community about what the PVO would be able to do.

In Bangladesh, where PVOs worked in tandem with government ministries, the integrated approach was found to have bogged down the process of the program significantly. The PVO had originally

specialized in health but, as it became developmental, diversified into other areas. The multiplication of project components required a parallel multiplication of PVO-ministry relations, each component corresponding to a different ministry. Since PVO-ministry relationships took considerable time to build, the need for various such relations, rather than one, increased excessively the work to be accomplished. On top of the need to form these additional PVO-ministry relationships, coordination between the various components was required--thus placing on the PVO the additional burden of getting ministries to coordinate their project-related activities with each other and with the PVO. The problem of inter-agency coordination for development projects is by now a legendary one; that it was also problematical for this particular project is not surprising.

An additional aspect of "integration" in the Bangladesh project was that some ministries were more cooperative than others, partly because of the nature of their respective tasks. Agriculture ministries had a separate specialist or separate department for each of various activities--livestock, crops, fisheries, etc. The PVO was thus dependent on forging several independent relationships with specialists--not just one with the ministry--in order to make the agriculture component work. (As recounted above, agriculture was also problematic because the specialists were less interested in working with the poor than were the staffs of ministries dealing with health, sanitation, family

planning and handicrafts.) In health, nutrition and family planning--all in the same ministry--the three areas overlapped enough in ministry organization and in practice that there was no such problem.

An evaluation of another integrated project in Gaza and the West Bank noted that though the PVO planned the integrated approach, it was forced by circumstances to do projects that were simply "targets of opportunity." The projects, that is, made no sense as part of the integrated approach, but were undertaken because there was strong local political pressure to do them. The projects were carried out quite successfully, the evaluation reported, "even though" the planned and integrated approach had to be foregone. Interestingly, this same and other evaluators criticized the projects resulting from the targets-of-opportunity approach as "unplanned," "of questionable value," and as reflecting "undue" local political influence. But such influence, after all, is also a form of "local participation." The critique of these results, in other words, reveals a certain contradiction between the PVO goal of participation and that of "development," as represented by the PVO's preference, in this case, for integrated planning. Here is a case where the top-down or outside-in model of PVO interaction with the community would give a less contradictory explanation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The projects were not good, the evaluation was saying, because the PVO was allowing itself to be diverted from its "outside" conception of what was the best way to proceed. (Also using the top-down model, I would add that the "integrated" approach was not the best choice among top-down strategies.)

Other evaluations expressed dissatisfaction with the integrated approach and its implications. An evaluation of a PVO using an integrated approach expressed impatience with the "endless juggling" of project components "without a conscious strategy to produce sustained secondary impact effects among them." Communities chosen for integrated projects in Bangladesh and Ghana were reported to be more interested in acquiring specific services through the PVO and did not want to engage in the across-the-board identification of community needs entailed in the community development approach.

There are three interesting implications of these evaluation findings, all of which relate to the ability of PVOs to reach the poorest. The first, from the Bangladesh experience, is that relations with government entities are important to getting things accomplished and that these relations vary according to the project design and activity. Multi-component projects, for example, require the establishment of several independent lines to various ministries or ministerial departments. Agricultural projects, another example, require more individual PVO-ministry relationships than do health-nutrition-family-planning projects, because of the greater specialization in agricultural ministries. Activities relating to agriculture, as a final example, involve specialists who tend to be less experienced and less sympathetic toward working with the poor than do activities in health, nutrition and family planning.

Based on these Bangladesh findings and my own experience, one might venture the following generalization about PVO-government relations: PVOs that started out specializing in health and then "integrate" into agriculture and other areas, may have reduced their ability to reach the poorest because of (1) the near-impossibility of forging many PVO-ministry relationships, as opposed to one; and (2) the lesser sympathy for the poor found among the technocrats of the "developmental" ministries. Exploring the nature of these PVO-government relations--under what conditions they work, or fail to--should be an important task of evaluation. It is discussed at length in the next section.

A second implication of the above examples is that in the days of pure relief, when PVOs didn't worry about development, they were more specialized or task-specific. They tended to work at one activity--community health programs, livestock assistance, small business enterprise, etc. They became competent at certain tasks and in certain countries and regions. With the new development orientation, and AID pressure and funds to build up their capacity as developmental agencies, they have expanded functionally and geographically. Though organizations can often succeed at taking on new tasks, after successfully performing a first one, this is not necessarily the case. And it seems not to have been the case in the examples presented above, partly because the new tasks were more difficult to target on the poor.

Improved targeting on the poor may actually result from narrowing down one's scope of activity--or shifting focus within a single activity--rather than from becoming more comprehensive. A community health program in Bangladesh, for example, pulled out of general clinics and specialized in maternal and child health only, because the general clinics were used mainly by men. Poverty and malnutrition were greater among the women-headed households than among the male, and the program wanted to target women. Similarly, agricultural credit programs have become more successful in reaching small farmers when credit activities were narrowed to food crops only, or to specific crops or varieties produced mainly by smaller farmers.

The point I am making about task specialization is really a collapsing of two points into one--namely, that certain tasks are more appropriate to targeting on the poor, and that organizations sometimes do better at single, well-defined tasks than comprehensive, diffuse ones. An example of the latter point, unrelated to the question of targetability, comes from a technical assistance program to a major steel mill in Indonesia. The evaluator found that the PVO was most successful in providing assistance where specific problems were addressed--such as maintenance and inventorying of heavy equipment and certain aspects of tin plating. The PVO was unsuccessful, however, in transferring techniques of policy planning and in assisting in the planning of a five-year program of plant expansion. Another

example of a discrete task and success is the area of credit to small business enterprise, which seems to have a more uniform rate of success than most PVO programs.

What's relief and what's development?

The third implication of the above examples is ironic. PVOs seem to be expanding from areas like health and nutrition (the "welfare" sectors) into the "development" sectors of agriculture, precisely at the moment that the large donors are turning toward the "social sectors," after learning that benefit distributions of public expenditures in these latter sectors tend to be more favorable to the poor. Just as PVOs have started to look at work in the social sectors as welfare rather than development, the large donors have been redefining the outputs of programs in the social sectors as "developmental"--i.e., as contributing to national output through the creation of a better-educated, better-housed, better-fed and more healthy work force.<sup>1</sup> Though the PVOs' desire to have a more long-lasting impact on the poor is a laudable change in strategy, then, this desire may cause PVOs and their funders to ignore the contribution they had made to activities that, though first taken on in the name of relief, have truly developmental potential.

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Burki (1981).

The welfare philosophy and the task of relief, in sum, helped PVOs in the past to gain special competence at certain tasks and in reaching the poor. The transition from relief to development may be diluting that special competence, and getting the PVOs into ways of thinking and doing things that make the task of reaching the poor more difficult--and that make these organizations look more like, rather than distinct from, the other donors. Thus the PVOs' self-proclaimed competence at reaching the poor may have been as much a function of the kinds of tasks they engaged in during the days of relief as it was of the character of the organizations themselves.

The new importance of the social sectors to large donors and governments--health, nutrition, family planning, education, potable water--would seem to constitute the real opportunity for PVOs to shine today. Indeed, some PVOs have questioned the dichotomous characterization of their past and present activities as relief vs. development, and worry that AID and others will not appreciate how relevant their past experience is to what they are doing now. PVOs, then, could show the way for governments in areas where they have specialized and where, at the same time, targeting on the poor may be easier.

To the extent that social-sector investments are now looked at as making permanent contributions to a country's growth, the relief-vs.-development dichotomy of the PVOs may not be a very useful one.



In certain ways, that is, this dichotomy is similar to the equity-vs.-growth discussion carried out among development economists and development-assistance practitioners over the last decade. The dichotomy came to be characterized as spurious by the more reformist among the technocrats and the economists--i.e., those philosophically closest to the PVOs. They argued that there were certain strategies by which one could pursue both growth and equity at the same time, and that various investments of benefit to the poor could not be characterized as "only" equity or welfare. It is ironic that in trying to "get away from relief," the PVOs sometimes sound more like the traditional development practitioners they criticize than the philosophically closer revisionists of that world.

Not reaching the poorest, in sum, may be a more serious contradiction of PVO philosophy than is sometimes understood, if the poorest actually represent a significant portion of the income distribution, as suggested above, and not a narrow stratum resting at its bottom. At the same time, reaching the poorest may not be as difficult for the PVOs as is sometimes suggested. Part of the difficulty may result from the very evolution of PVOs from relief to development, as discussed in this section. Another aspect of this transition, not discussed here, is the very growth and sophistication that has been thrust upon PVOs in their new role as development entities. The greater bureaucratization that has accompanied such

growth may be diminishing the flexibility and experimental qualities that are characteristic of small organizations with circumscribed responsibilities.

With the idea of making the poor less unreachable, one might want to ask the following kinds of questions of evaluators. Of those projects that reach the truly poorest, what explains their ability, and not others, to do so? What is the nature of the activity? of the interaction between the PVO and the poorest? of the PVO itself? of the elite-poor relations in the community? If this subject were routinely looked into by evaluators, one could eventually make some comparative statements about the comparative suitability of certain project styles and activities for the poorest.

#### Looking for spillovers

In the cases where PVOs are doing good projects that reach the middle and upper groups in the rural income distribution, does this matter, if they are doing the job well? What does it matter, that is, if they are providing goods and services to those who previously had no access to them, if they are causing growth in the form of small-scale increases in production and improvements in productivity? Some would argue, including myself, that this is a significant accomplishment. Others would add that the poorest can be helped only by the trickle-down effects of such efforts, or by charity--

as was stated in evaluations of the community development program in South Korea.<sup>1</sup> Though some would have no trouble with this line of argument, the PVOs might. In their own eyes, it may make them sound too much like the very advocates of trickle-down they criticize. Thinking of the poorest as a small unreachable minority, again, keeps this issue from emerging as a problem. But if the poorest represent a significant proportion of the population, then PVO activity could well be interpreted as practicing trickle-down in a decentralized way.

I emphasize the trickle-down issue not to expose contradictions in the PVO philosophy, or because I think PVOs should explain themselves more consistently, but to explain why I think it is important for evaluators to look for spillover and spread effects. In cases where projects are controlled by local elites, the maximization of these spread effects may be the best way of reaching the poorest. Some ways of working with local elites will lead to benefits for the wider community and others will not. Some community projects will

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<sup>1</sup>Commenting on the fact that the PVO concentrated its efforts in the better-off communities, the evaluator noted that the PVO's community development technique worked best among the better-off. One could not fault the PVO, therefore, for not working among the poorest. "Except for outright charity," the evaluator said in reporting the reactions of the PVO to this finding, helping the poorest would simply have to depend on "trickle-down." Improving the position of the poorest and at the same time carrying out a good development program, the evaluator concluded, were contradictory objectives.

benefit the poor in greater proportion to their participation in decisionmaking than will other types of projects. Evaluators need to look for this type of variation, but cannot do it unless they have a good sense of who the poorest are and how they earn a living, and unless they track down the spread of project benefits in and beyond the community.

The lines of questioning that should be pursued by evaluators can be illustrated with reference to the PVO evaluations. Some evaluators point out or recommend a strategy of elite cooptation, whereby elites are given first access to project benefits so as to "buy" their support for a project's subsequent activities. As noted above, for example, the South Korea program provided the best cows to local leaders for this reason, as well as first access to housing repair materials and assistance. A church-related community project in Niger gave elites the first chance to acquire new things like cement wells in order to persuade them to support the projects, a policy that also increased existing inequalities (Franke & Chasin 1980). One evaluator of various PVO projects recommended that village projects should start off with activities clearly beneficial to the elites in order to win the support of the "powers that be," or at least to forestall their opposition (Coombs 1981:47). This commentator responded to criticisms that had been made of one particular project's water development activities, which had benefited mainly larger farmers,

by suggesting that these activities had also averted the opposition of these large farmers to later projects designed specifically to benefit the poorest community members.<sup>1</sup>

Are these assumptions about the results of elite cooptation borne out? Does the giving of first claim to elites facilitate a later extension of project benefits to poorer members--or does this first move lock the project into elite benefits or benefiting the elites only? How do the answers vary with the nature of the activity and the type of project environment? What was the result of the strategy of the South Korea program, for example, of providing the best cows to local leaders so as to "buy" their participation and support? In the cases where it worked, were the inferior cows distributed fairly equitably in the community? Were the less well-off community members aware that they were receiving inferior cows, and how did they react to it? Was the difference in cow quality such as to make it economically worthwhile for the recipients of the inferior cows to keep them? Was there a "spread" mechanism that worked beyond the cows? For example, were the local leaders "bought"

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<sup>1</sup>Designing programs so as to coopt elites, of course, is not limited to PVO projects. A study of basic-human-needs programs, for example, noted that certain countries like Egypt, Pakistan and Sri Lanka had adopted general food-subsidy programs rather than limiting these programs to the poor because such programs would not have been politically acceptable without the large leakages to elites (Burki 1981:176).

with cows in exchange for their support for other community projects unrelated to cows, that had more favorable distributional characteristics? Does the experience teach us anything about the strategy of benefiting the poor by buying the cooperation of the elites? What do the examples above teach us, finally, about the conditions under which it might be desirable and feasible to by-pass the elites entirely rather than to include them (as discussed on pages 39-40)?

A similar set of questions could be asked of the community development projects in Colombia and Honduras cited above. How would one interpret the fact that the projects resulted in 15%-20% of community households having piped water and latrines, and that only the families with land and cattle received Lorena stoves and fish ponds? At the time of the evaluation, was the community in the course of providing these goods to the remaining 80%-85% of the households, or were the 15%-20% a dead end? If these project goods were indeed being supplied to the less well-off, what was the mechanism by which the "spread" was occurring? If the 15% was a dead end--which I would suspect, given the nature of the goods provided--were there any indirect impacts? Did the initial achievement set in motion other community projects with a less built-in tendency for skewness in the distribution of benefits?

Was the nutritional status of the community, or its poorest members, improved by an increased supply of fish in the community? Or was fish-pond production consumed by the elite households that received the ponds, or was it shipped out of the community? Did the fish ponds and the water connections represent a first step in "buying" elite support for further community projects of a more equitable distribution? Was there any rationale, of this or any other nature, that made the improvements of elite households a logical first step in such a program? These kinds of questions should be central to PVO evaluations because they represent tests of the PVO proposition that the processes they use in their community work are the best way to improve the lives of the poor.

#### IV - Relations with Government

As noted in the introduction, PVOs often describe their strengths by saying what they are not. They are free, they say, of the bad qualities of public-sector donors: the largeness, the rigidity, and the predominance of bureaucratic cares rather than concern for people. They also contrast their strengths to parallel weaknesses in third-world bureaucracies, though they distinguish between committed and uncommitted governments. The good-bad distinction of PVO rhetoric is said by some to refer to PVOs in contrast mainly to AID, rather than to public-sector entities of the third world. But it is difficult to distinguish the two in the rhetoric: large public-sector donors, after all, work through third-world governments, and it is the combination of the two that turns out, in the rhetoric, to be ineffective.

Though the contrast that PVOs make between themselves and the public sector has its truths, it also obscures the fact that PVO projects are often intertwined with the public sector in myriad ways. What the public sector is doing, therefore, is highly relevant to the outcomes of a large subset of PVO projects, contributing to success as well as to failure. Before discussing these interdependent relations, I would like to comment briefly on the meaning of the PVO comparison of their own qualities to those of public-sector entities.

My attention was originally drawn to PVO-government interdependencies by a perplexing contradiction I found in the PVO evaluations,



in my conversations with ex-PVO staffers, and in my previous fieldwork. PVO rhetoric often describes the public sector unflatteringly and yet, in many cases, there turn out to be all kinds of PVO-government relations in the field, particularly in the health sector. Even when a project requires no formal coordination between PVO and government, informal relationships at the field level are often important and the feelings between the two parties are often good. (Frequently, of course, the case is the opposite.) If interdependency with government is so often significant in PVO projects, and the relationships so often good, why the rhetoric of distance and the unflattering portrayal of public-sector efforts to reach the poor?

The obvious part of the explanation is that the U.S. government has granted considerable funding to PVOs in the 1970s, through the U.S. foreign assistance program, precisely on the grounds that they are better than the public sector--that is, AID projects with third-world governments--at projects for the poor. Since these foreign assistance funds have helped PVOs to reverse the long-term decline in private contributions, it is important for their own survival that their claim to distinctiveness be maintained. But many U.S. PVOs that are not funded by AID, as well as many non-U.S. PVOs, also describe their strengths as opposites of the qualities of the public sector.<sup>1</sup> There must be some more general explanation, therefore,

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Kramer (1981), Coombs (1981), Sommer (1977).

for the contradiction between PVO rhetoric and reality with respect to the public sector.

An article on alternative organizations in the United States helped me to understand this contradiction. In a study of "collectivist-democratic" organizations in California, Rothschild-Whitt (1976) pointed out that these groups tended to justify their existence as "alternative institutions" by their opposition to existing institutions and cultural values. The opposition might be real or only symbolic. Not only did the alternative organizations define themselves in this oppositional way but, the author suggested, their growth might actually be enhanced by the existence of a hostile institution they could oppose (p. 79). Based on this interpretation, the author hypothesized that the introduction of reforms in the criticized and dominant institution, along the lines pioneered by the alternative organization, would end up weakening the alternative organization, which now would have less to oppose.

Though PVOs are in some ways different than the groups described by Rothschild-Whitt, it is clear that the anti-government rhetoric of PVOs has played a similar role. It has helped these organizations justify their existence, and has given them a well-defined (and homogenous) way of describing what they are. As PVOs come to work side by side with governments, funded in part by AID, one can see that it might be more difficult for them to maintain

their claim to sharp differentness from the public sector. Indeed, many PVOs will not take AID funding for fear of this threat to their distinctive approach; some PVOs disapprove of other PVOs that have become "like private contractors," engaging in direct contract work for AID and third-party governments.

In a study of PVOs in the U.S., Israel, England and the Netherlands, Kramer (1981) makes a related point. He reports that the public's perception of voluntary agencies in England is that they supplement what the public sector does, rather than that they have a "distinctive approach" (p. 251). Supplementing or compensating for the lack of sufficient public-sector resources, he says, is "a weak rationale" in the eyes of a voluntary agency. If the PVO is seen as "just another nongovernmental public-service provider," that is, then it loses its claim to distinctiveness. He goes on to say that when voluntary agencies work inside a framework determined by government funding (as is the case of PVOs with AID funding), they "have to work hard to avoid being a tool of government."

AID funding of PVOs, then, puts them in a difficult position in terms of their self-image. They get chosen for being "unlike government" and, in the same act, are brought into close contact with government. In certain ways, moreover, they come under its control. They are not only subject to outside audits, evaluations, and government-requested changes in their structure (e.g., creation of monitoring

and evaluation units); but they are also carrying out an objective of the criticized institution, regardless of the fact that the dominant institution's objective is consistent with their own philosophy. Though the government mandate may represent a "takeover" by the public sector of concerns pioneered by PVOs, this takeover still represents a dilution of the original pioneering distinctiveness of the organization, as Rothschild-Whitt points out above. In these circumstances, it is more difficult for PVOs to claim a distinctive approach, because they are working so supplementarily with government.

It is understandable, then, that PVOs would continue to claim their differentness from government, and to describe their strengths as being the opposite of government weaknesses--regardless of whether they are working closely and approvingly with public-sector entities. To me, this explains the seeming contradiction between the rhetoric of PVO documents and what some PVOs, and PVO persons, are actually doing and saying. Though the PVO-government contrast is understandable as a form of self-definition, it also obscures the rich and complex relations with government that some PVO projects have, and the contribution that PVOs are making in this supplementary way. After giving a few examples of the various forms of PVO-government relations, I would like to suggest some ways of looking at this interdependence in future evaluation work.

Cases of relations

In a PVO community development project in Ghana, the health component was the only successful one. This was because the nurses in the program were trained and paid by the ministry of health, which also supplied drugs to the program. In a Colombia community health program, one government entity supplied building materials, and the ministry of health supplied personnel. The PVO trained the community health workers and had overall management responsibility. Also in Colombia, a community health program received government participation in the form of materials for aqueducts, salaries, construction of pre-school centers and an agricultural center. In a successful food-distribution program in Morocco, the PVO had to work hand in hand with the government entity that had the food-distribution infrastructure because it had no such facilities of its own. In The Gambia, the PVO had a contract to train community health workers for the ministry of health. Likewise in a Ghana program, there was considerable complementarity between the PVO and the government. In a feeder-roads maintenance project in Sierra Leone, government intervention in the budget process in favor of monies allocated for maintenance was crucial to the success of the project. (The roads were important to the government, in turn, because they were crucial to the success of a rural development project being financed by the World Bank.)

In a successful community development program in South Korea, there was not only close cooperation between local and national government officials and the PVO, but the government contributed more than the PVO to the program. More generally, the success of the South Korea program was said to have been very much influenced by favorable macroeconomic policies toward agriculture--in contrast to the policy environment of many other countries, particularly in Latin America and Africa. These favorable policies included the guarantee of a minimum, subsidized price for rice to farmers, the introduction and subsidization of high-yielding varieties of rice, the provision of agricultural extension, and the undertaking of infrastructure investments that made agriculture profitable.

Interdependence of PVOs with governments, of course, does not always work well. A community development project in Colombia, for example, received no cooperation from the government in the training of indigenous Indian women to serve as health practitioners. For many years, the requests for collaboration by an indigenous health PVO in Bangladesh were turned down by the ministry of health, which frowned on such unorthodox practices as the use of female paramedics (Coombs 1981:33). (Ultimately, the ministry of health became interested.) Interdependence with government, furthermore, is not always the rule. In general, many PVOs have traditionally desired to "keep their distance" from government (Coombs 1981:57). The evaluation of a community development

program in Colombia suggested that the PVO seemed to be more successful in the remoter communities, because of the complete absence of government institutions in those areas. This theme was echoed by another evaluator, who found that various PVO officials tended to look at working in remote areas as a way of avoiding "negative influences," in that these more remote areas were probably "unattractive to those who can be most meddlesome."<sup>1</sup>

Except for the cases cited above, many of the examples so far suggest that there is a world of complementarity between PVO and government work. Why does interdependence with governments work well in some cases and not in others? Are there certain tasks or sectors characterized by such interdependence, or in which it seems to work particularly well or badly? The Bangladesh evaluation, for example, reported better success at PVO coordination with government in health, family planning and nutrition than in production-related activities like agriculture. Is there a division of labor between

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<sup>1</sup> Looking at government as a negative influence on projects, it should be said, is a view that is not limited to PVOs. The evaluator of eleven technical assistance projects of the United Nations concluded that "physical isolation" from government provided good insulation against "bureaucratic disturbances" in the form of policy shifts, interference of politicians, and bureaucratic struggles among local ministries and international agencies (Kilby 1979:319-21). This physical isolation, the evaluator reported, was one of the three variables associated with project success.

government and PVO that works particularly well? What role is played by the level of commitment of the staffs of government entities in ensuring that cooperation occurs? Is there any meaning, finally, to the fact that the above examples of successful coordination are taken mainly from the area of health--an area in which many PVOs have developed a special competence? Is there any relation between PVO success in health, family planning and nutrition and the tendency to find coordination with governments in this area?



At a more general level, what is the relation between national economic and political contexts and PVO success or failure? What does it mean that a successful "participatory" community development program in South Korea was carried out in a highly supportive and authoritarian political context? What is the significance for that type of PVO project that its success was in great part influenced by highly favorable macro-economic policies? Does this have any implications for PVO strategy in most other countries, where economic policy contexts are unfavorable for agriculture and, yet, where the same approach is used?

#### Replication and the vanguard role

Another aspect of the PVO-government dimension is the extent to which governments copy, take over, or expand upon what PVOs have done. This issue is an important one, since it can result in a PVO project having much greater impact on the poor than the funding would allow. It is also important because PVO's say their comparative advantage lies in being experimental and innovative. If this is the case, one would expect to see adoption by government of some of the lessons learned in the PVO "experiments." Lack of adoption by government, of course, does not necessarily mean that PVOs have been unsuccessful; it may simply mean that the governments do not have the resources, the institutional capability or the interest to adopt a PVO innovation.

Because the PVO evaluations do not address the question of "diffusion" to governments, information on the subject is only fragmentary, but suggests that more diffusion may be taking place than one would think. In Tanzania, a successful cattle-dips project was eventually absorbed by the government's animal health program. Another PVO project in that country, for village water supply, was eventually taken over by the regional government's water department. A program for village polytechnic schools in Kenya was started by a PVO group and is now run by the government. The South Korean government looked upon the PVO involved in the above-described community development project as the source of new ideas about development projects. (What ideas, one should ask in future evaluations, did it find most useful?)

In Sri Lanka, a skills training project for women was being duplicated by a new ministry of youth and employment, which characterized the PVO project as "one jump ahead of the government." In Jamaica, the ministry of youth and community development was considering asking a PVO engaged in community development activities to train its own personnel to do this kind of work. In Guatemala, a new governmental agricultural research institute, working innovatively in understanding and making recommendations for peasant farming systems, took over and amplified a PVO project working in this area (White & Gostyla 1980:41). In India, an indigenous PVO did surveys

financed by government agencies, which later used the results of the surveys as a basis for large investments in irrigation and rural electrification (Coombs 1981:32). Collaboration with government was so successful in this case that innovative government officers actively encouraged the PVO to take on important tasks and do experiments that it was not possible for their own agencies to do.

Several PVO programs of credit to small business enterprise have attracted some form of public-sector support. In Northeast Brazil, for example, research on the success of a U.S. PVO's small-business-enterprise project was supported by a state planning department and financed by a regional development bank (Coelho & Fuenzalida 1980:2). The indigenous PVO, founded by the U.S. PVO, set up an advisory board composed of representatives of government, as well as local businessmen, so as to increase probability that successful results obtained by the program could be replicated on a larger scale (Schreiber 1975:5). Almost ten years after the creation of the indigenous PVO, the Brazilian government now bears most of its administrative costs.

As a final example of diffusion to government, a government entity in Morocco providing infrastructure to the PVO for a food distribution program eventually took over responsibility for the whole program. As the competence and power of this government entity grew, moreover, another ministry (health) took an interest in participating as well. When this latter ministry's cooperation

had first been sought at the beginning of the project, it had wanted nothing to do with a program that involved food distribution. After the program had proven itself workable, as well as increasing the power of a competing ministry, the health ministry showed much more interest. This story is strikingly similar to the Bangladesh example of the preceding subsection, where the ministry of health became an enthusiastic collaborator of an indigenous health PVO after years of adamant resistance. As in the Morocco case, the reason for the change of heart may have been related to the increasingly conspicuous success of the private health program.

Little information on government adoption of PVO successes is available and no studies of replication have been made for PVOs working in the third world (Sommer 1977; 132:6). At least in the past, it has been said, PVO influence only rarely spread to other areas or programs, and "least of all to governmental programs" (Coombs 1981:57). One comparative evaluation of PVO projects in Africa found that replication of successful projects would have been too expensive, particularly in terms of personnel requirements, and that little "scaling up" of these projects took place. The AID mission in India made a similar judgment about a PVO project in a village there; though successful, the evaluation said, the project was not replicable because it was dependent on an extremely dedicated volunteer labor force, "steeped in" PVO methodology and ideology,

in addition to a large PVO staff presence and heavy financial inputs.

Another evaluator reported the frequently-expressed PVO sentiment against replication and government support: several innovative credit programs in Latin America, a PVO officer was reported to have said, had been ruined by their success. They attracted "too much" interest and additional funding, and overexpanded and diversified as a result, ending up being less efficient at their original circumscribed task.

Some studies of PVOs working in the U.S. and other Western countries have found that PVOs were not more innovative than public-sector organizations, and often less so. PVO approaches tended not to be picked up by governments, it was found, and to the extent that there was replication, it was from one PVO to the other.<sup>1</sup> This form of replication, including adoption by local private institutions, is important to watch for in evaluations. The studies reported by Kramer also found that new PVO programs were shaped more by governmental interests, priorities and funds, than by experimental and innovative initiatives of the PVOs themselves. Whether true or not of PVOs

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<sup>1</sup>Kramer (1981). Four reasons were suggested for why PVO programs are usually not replicated: (1) size (a service modality may be effective for a small number of selected clients, but not if it must be available to all; governmental provision to a small group, in turn, may be difficult to justify politically); (2) values embodied in the service may be sectarian, controversial, or not popular; (3) there may be no parallel administrative jurisdiction operating at the level at which the PVO operates; and (4) the PVO clientele or service may be of low priority to the government.

working in the third world, these findings are certainly consistent with my impressions, as reported in this paper, that PVOs sometimes seem to be talking or acting more like AID and the World Bank, rather than differently from them. As noted in the introduction, for example, the participatory rhetoric may to some extent reflect what PVOs think AID wants to hear from them, rather than the way these organizations would normally describe what they do. At a recent AID seminar on rural electrification, some participants commented on evaluation findings showing that though electrification cooperatives often turned out to be efficient business organizations, they certainly were not participatory--even though the PVO providing assistance to these cooperatives always described them as participatory in their literature. "Of course they're not participatory!" a representative of the PVO responded to these comments. "It was AID that wanted to hear them described that way, so we did."

The Kramer study also presented findings suggesting that governments in the studied countries had been at least as innovative in social-service programs as the voluntary organizations, and that the idea of the voluntary agency as vanguard had come to be regarded as an outdated myth. Another interesting finding of this study, also contrary to the PVO self-description, was that the PVOs that were innovative were the largest, the most bureaucratized and the most professionalized of this type of organization. The other

innovating category of PVOs was the newer groups in their early stages of growth. This finding is compatible with other studies in the organizational literature on the stages of organizational growth. If PVO innovativeness is a function of organizational youth and newness, Kramer says, then one might cultivate it by encouraging a high birth rate for such agencies and discouraging their "proverbial low mortality." Clearly, AID's or any funder's role has been to encourage low mortality, with its institutional support grants, rather than high proliferation and high mortality rates for PVOs. What AID is obtaining with its support to PVOs, then, may be something other than innovative organizations. AID support of the institutionalization of PVOs as development agencies, in other words, may not help to preserve innovativeness but may instead speed up the process through which it is lost. If the "innovative role" is indeed more myth than reality, it is important to gain a more realistic view through evaluation of what it is that PVOs are doing well.

The case of PVOs working in the third world may be different from that of the organizations studied above. The examples of replications cited above represent some evidence of this nature. Many governments, moreover, may not have the institutional capacity and funds to adopt successful PVO programs, and hence the lack of adoption is not necessarily a sign of the lack of replicability. At the moment, however, no evidence has been accumulated by PVOs and

their evaluators for making the case that these organizations are experimental and that the results of the experiments have been diffused more widely. The subject, therefore, is an important one for evaluation.

A few notes of caution about looking into the replication or adoption question. An evaluator cannot assume that adoption by government means that a program has been successful. Governments may adopt out of pressure to look like they are doing something, or to get rid of an organization they consider undesirable. As Kramer points out, adoption may represent being bailed out by a local authority, getting rid of an albatross, or a problem of PVO mismanagement, As in the Moroccan case above, moreover, adoption may be caused by jealousy by one government ministry of the power and glory obtained through the program by another ministry. (Of course, it is difficult to imagine a case of adoption through such competitive jealousy that would not involve a successful program.)

When governments adopt PVO programs, as in the examples above, the PVO contribution could be described as having lowered the costs to government entities of embarking upon certain programs by first showing that they can be done. This may be a more accurate description of what PVOs do than that of innovation; in many cases, that is, they may be introducing a technique that has already been tried and proven elsewhere--for example, the use of community paraprofessionals



in medicine. Introduction of the "old" technique by the PVO, in this case, lowers the political and financial costs to a particular government of initiating a program that, though proven elsewhere, is not yet known in that particular country. This suggested reformulation of what PVOs are good at turns out to be consistent with the reinterpretation of the "vanguard role" suggested by Kramer. Rather than innovation, he says, the PVO contribution has taken the form of expanding or improving upon an existing voluntary service--which is then sometimes continued with government support.

The PVO role can also be characterized in many cases as being a "precursor" to government--an interpretation that might be given to some of the examples of the following section. The "precursor" model, of course, is completely consistent with the historical role of PVOs in relation to the development of the public sector in many Western countries. Kramer (1981), for example, points out how PVOs preceded the public sector in social services before the 1930s in the United States; and Weisbrod (1977:63) points to the example of 16th century England, where PVOs preceded the government in supplying funds for schools, hospitals, nontoll roads, fire-fighting equipment, public parks, bridges, dikes and causeways.

Understanding through evaluation the transition from PVO to public sector would require considerable interviewing of the relevant government professionals and officials--in order to find out their

views of what the PVO is doing, how it compares to what government is doing, and what instances of adoption and adaptation may be occurring. To date, most PVO evaluations show little contact with the world of government agencies, resulting in a lack of a sense of the PVO-government link, as well as of the macro-economic and political environment. (The issue of PVOs as innovative organizations is discussed further in Section V.)

#### Change, superfluity and takeover

One particularly important form of adoption of PVO programs by governments may go unnoticed because of the conflictual setting in which it usually occurs. Governments often make major policy decisions to turn their attention to the poor as a previously neglected sector or client group, embarking upon bold, new programs in this area. The Mexican government's massive new program of production and nutritional assistance to the peasant sector (S.A.M.) is an example. Another such case is Nicaragua, where the rural poor have suddenly become the central preoccupation of government attention, as a result of a change of regime. When a government abruptly moves into territory previously unoccupied by it, it is often politically difficult for that government to tolerate any private, let alone foreign, actors in a field that now has been declared of major policy significance.

Previous to major public-sector moves into an area, a government may have been perfectly content to allow an outside organization to "occupy" that area. It may not have had the political and financial resources to make a policy commitment to these groups; it may not have been interested in these groups itself; it may have felt that the PVO actually made it look good because certain groups were being taken care of by the PVO; or it may have felt it could not expend its political capital in supporting one small client group--such as pockets of Indian groups living in remote areas of South America. Thus it is that in some countries with extreme problems of poverty and little political will or institutional capability to deal with the problems, PVOs are like para-governments, "dividing up the territory between them," as one evaluator remarked about the various PVOs in Haiti.<sup>1</sup>

When PVOs are in territory unoccupied by the government, relations between the two may be very smooth. As one evaluator of

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<sup>1</sup>In a recent speech, a minister of state in Bangladesh bemoaned the difficulty of engaging in sector and country-wide programs because of the different approaches and projects of each PVO in its separate geographical domain. (Bangladesh is a country where the concentration of PVOs is high.) He referred to the PVO approach as "rent-a-county"--i.e., in which to do your project. The "rented" county was then no longer subject to government directives or standardizations, the minister said, because of it having been "rented" to the PVO by the government.

PVO projects suggested, PVO-government relations seemed best when competition with government agencies was not severe.

Substantial geographical complementarity may also exist between the PVO and government activities, as illustrated above, with the PVO helping to extend a government program further. In countries with repressive governments that do not allow independent peasant organizing, moreover, PVOs may be the only tolerated form of assistance to and organizing among the poor. This has been the case in many Latin American countries over the last decade, particularly among church groups following the Liberation theology.

When governments suddenly move into the areas previously occupied peacefully by PVOs, they sometimes find it difficult to tolerate the power or prestige that the PVO has come to hold in that area. Bad relations may ensue, such as occurred with a PVO health project in Nicaragua after the overthrow of Somoza and takeover of the government by the Sandinistas. Similarly, relations with an AID-funded indigenous PVO in Nicaragua have also deteriorated, as the new government has moved into the PVO-occupied territory in a major way--i.e., organization of peasant farmers, and provision of agricultural credit and inputs. In Mexico, hostility exists between the public sector and an IAF-funded Mexican PVO that organizes peasant groups and gets them public-sector credit, as a result of a major

move by the public sector in that area.<sup>1</sup>

In many cases, then, the new government moves introduce competition to the PVO for the first time--an "unfair" competition, in the sense that the competitor-government has the political power to make life difficult for the PVO or, if it likes, to get rid of it. The government, in turn, can no longer appreciate or tolerate the presence of the PVO, partly because it may diminish the political allegiance that governments expect to gain by suddenly bestowing massive attention on a neglected group. Verbal sniping between the PVO and the staffs of government entities may take place--as occurred in Nicaragua, between the PVO and the regional health ministry representatives. More commonly, the lack of good working relations between PVO and government entities takes the form of a polite neglect to carry out promises made to provide support to the project. In evaluations, this problem will often be reported, as expressed by PVO staff, as inefficiency and unreliability of the government entity. Though this characterization may not be inaccurate, it may also be significantly incomplete, if indeed the lack of cooperation also reflects a lack of government sympathy for what the PVO is doing.

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<sup>1</sup>One commentator on this paper, with more PVO experience than my own, has suggested that the cases illustrated in this paragraph and discussed subsequently may be more characteristic of indigenous PVOs working in their own countries than U.S. PVOs working abroad.

When a repressive government is replaced by a reformist one, the political meaning of what the PVO is doing may change markedly. Whereas under the repressive government the PVO may be considered reformist, a sole defender of the poor, it may suddenly look reactionary under the new government, because of the ill will between the two sides. As "injured" party, the PVO becomes anti-government because it is being treated "unfairly" by the government, in the course of the latter's massive attempts to treat the poor fairly. Thus it is that in Nicaragua the AID-funded private development foundation mentioned above has become a part of the opposition to the Sandinista government. The government, increasingly irritated by the criticism and the outside funding of the private organization, has exercised its power of "unfair" competition: it has taken a certain control over all such private groups, requiring that any outside funding to them be channeled through the government. Though the PVO-government situation in Mexico has not taken on this character, the mutual lack of respect between the PVO and the public sector is enough that there will probably be little transmission of PVO learning and experience to the government in its new venture.

Because PVO evaluations focus so completely on the world of the PVO project, giving little sense of what is happening in the broader political and public-sector context, it is easy to miss the real meaning of PVO complaints about lack of cooperation by or difficult

relations with government entities. It may be that major changes are happening in the public-sector environment, and that the PVO complaints are indicative of a new world in which the needs of the poor are being addressed in a way they never before have been---even though the government may not be particularly interested in including the PVO in the new picture. Government dissatisfaction with the PVO may reflect the PVO's reluctance to acknowledge the government's legitimate control over what was previously, by default, PVO territory.

The story of the PVO working in community health in Nicaragua sounds very much like the situation described above. Previous to the overthrow of Somoza, the PVO complained, its staff had operated "autonomously" and had "identified strongly" with the personnel they had trained and the communities they served. They perceived the new government's health coordinator in their region as "encroaching on their territory," and said that their local staff would quit if the ministry of health tried to "manipulate them." For these types of cases, it may be best for the PVO to go elsewhere; or, it may be more in the interests of the poor for the PVO to swallow its pride and put itself in the service of the reforming government. This seems to have happened in the Tanzania case, where a village health scheme, financed through a consortium of PVCs, was one of the first attempts by a foreign church-related organization to structure a project entirely within the Ujamaa village framework of the socialist government.

New reformist programs may so completely swamp what a PVO is doing that the PVO contribution becomes superfluous. In these cases, it may be best for the PVO to go and work elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> This kind of swamping was the complaint of the Mexican PVO noted above: the new Mexican government initiatives in the countryside, it said, were making it "too easy" for the peasants by offering credit and other assistance without requiring, as the PVO did, that they first organize and go through a process of identifying their needs. By making it easy on the peasants, in other words, the government had made it hard on the PVO, winning away "its" peasants. In a case like this, one would assume that the poor would have a better chance of improving their lot through the government initiatives--if only because of their breadth--than through the PVO.

As outside funder, it would seem, AID would not want to continue to back PVO activities in a country where, by a strange twist of fate, the PVO suddenly found itself working at cross-purposes to

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<sup>1</sup>That PVO activities may be superfluous, or simply substituting what government is already doing, is a possibility that is not restricted to these situations of abrupt policy change. In a community development project in Yemen, roads were being built by communities that had the right to obtain the roadbuilding services and financing from the Ministry of Public Works. In a Haiti project, PVO schools were being built alongside schools financed out of a large World Bank project. In Bolivia, an agribusiness and artisanry project was financing producers who normally would have taken financing from regular commercial sources at higher interest rates (84:5). These examples illustrate the importance to evaluation of placing PVO programs in their larger context.



a reformist government. After all, such dramatic changes in policy and public-sector activity also represent a dramatic altering of the conditions under which AID chose the PVO, rather than the public sector, to do the task in the first place: major policy shifts such as the SAM program in Mexico, the regime change in Nicaragua, or the socialist government in Tanzania, indicate significant political interest in making the public sector fit for the task. It is under these circumstances that AID may prefer to help the public sector become fit, because of the opportunity to have a much greater impact on the poor than that allowed by the scope of PVO projects.

Evaluators, in sum, should interpret PVO complaints about governments with care, watching to see if a complaints are indicative of favorable changes for the poor in the broader environment. Just as important, evaluators should try to understand what causes some PVOs to be able to accompany these sudden shifts to reformism--as in the Tanzania case. Under what conditions are PVOs able to contribute to government expansion into previously unoccupied territories, rather than to see these expansions only as incompetent versions of what they (the PVOs) have been doing, or as incursions into their "own" territory? What explains the cases where governments try to take advantage of previous PVO experience, rather than to discredit it?

### Between the poor and the public sector

PVOs often describe their work as helping the poor to take control over their destinies, to arise out of the dependency that determines their relations with all "patrons," including government itself. The goal and the success of the India Oilseed Growers Cooperative were described in these terms: the oilseed growers freed themselves from dependency on the government by gaining the ability to make their own seed.

One of the principles of another PVO was that a community should imagine itself as a self-contained and independent economic unit.

The independence-from-government theme, is particularly characteristic of Catholic social action and other church-related groups, who teach the poor to learn what their own resources are, and how to mobilize them, instead of counting on help from outside the community to materialize. Though many PVO projects do help the poor to provide for themselves those things that they previously and in vain expected to get only from the "outside," many projects are of just the opposite nature: they help the poor to link up to the services of government. Some examples follow.

The principal achievement of a community development project in Colombia was said to be the teaching of native communities how to work with government agencies.

Another community development project in Colombia was said to have taught Indian communities what government and private services were available, and how they could

obtain them. An important achievement of a community health program in Ecuador was said to be that the members of the project communities were now beginning to recognize that they could make additional demands on public service providers. In Bolivia, achievements of a community development project with Indian communities were said to be that (1) the PVOs succeeded in getting the ministry of education to construct 30 new schools in the area; and (2) several women, trained as teachers by the PVO, succeeded in getting onto the government payroll. An evaluation of a development program grant for another PVO reported that the main developmental activities of that organization were aimed primarily at creating an absorptive capacity at the local level "to better utilize host government services and bilateral assistance by international agencies." In Botswana, the principal contribution of a PVO was said to be the legitimacy it provided to certain youth brigades vis-a-vis the government.

In these examples, the PVOs are playing an important intermediary role between the poor and the public sector. They are brokers or advocates for the poor, helping them to get access to the public sector. They are "enlightened patrons" for the poor, a role that has often been played by public-sector agencies themselves. When extension services have been particularly successful at reaching poor farmers, for example, their contribution has often taken the form of opening up access to services and subsidies already available

to better-off farmers--rather than the stated objective of bringing new technologies and increased productivity to small farmers. PVOs as brokers, then, can be of considerable assistance to the poor. The role is a particularly apt one for PVOs, moreover, because of its person-intensive nature: the PVO supplies the intermediation and the public sector supplies the resources.

Because PVOs sometimes portray relations between the poor and the public-sector as having the potential for dependency, there may be a tendency for evaluators to miss the significance of this brokerage role, when it is successfully played. Evaluators should be alert to the possibility in some projects that a PVO's success or failure may hinge on its ability to link up the poor to the public sector--just as in other projects it may involve the freeing of the poor from their relation to the public sector, as in the case of the oilseed growers. Evaluators should try to understand which of these two objectives best describes what the project set out to do, or actually achieved. In the brokerage cases, the evaluator should find out what it was about the PVO and the public sector that made the intermediation work or not work.

### Conclusion

I have specified a set of various possible relationships between PVOs and governments, and have suggested how these relationships can affect how a project turns out. One might name these relationships

in the following way (some of the categories are overlapping):

(1) complementarity; (2) filling unoccupied territory; (3) replication or diffusion; (4) government takeover (in some cases, a subcategory of the previous); (5) competition or substitution; and (6) brokerage.

Evaluators should watch out for these relations, and how they are determining what is happening. In some cases, PVO success may be able to be defined as relating well to a "good" public sector--or helping to make a public sector better at reaching the poor. Finally, some of the strongest cases of PVO impact on the poor may work through the mechanism of public-sector amplification of PVO action. If one wants to show that PVOs are indeed a particularly appropriate instrument for reaching the poor, then it is important to find out what causes this amplification to take place.

### V - More on Innovation

Evaluators of PVO projects should start out with a sense of what the state of the art is in the particular sector in which the PVO is working--whether it be maternal and child health, nutrition education, agricultural extension, small-business credit, self-help housing. Though this kind of background knowledge is important for any evaluation of development projects, it is particularly important for PVOs because of their claim that they are better at experimental, innovative approaches than are large donors and governments. PVOs may indeed be more innovative and experimental in certain areas; they have made important contributions, it has been said, in primary health care, non-formal education, and appropriate technology. But the very smallness of PVOs in relation to the large donors means that they do not do the research, writing and information dissemination on their experience that large donors have done. Information on the state of the art in development projects, then, must be drawn mainly from the research and evaluation outputs of large donors and academic institutions.

There was little in the PVO evaluations to go by in trying to determine whether projects were innovative. There was clear evidence, however, that certain projects were not innovative, or were using approaches considered to be outmoded. I present some examples below, and then continue on to discuss what seems to be

an important area of PVO innovation--credit to small enterprises. My attention was drawn to the small-enterprise projects, by the way, not by the individual evaluations of them but by an AID research project in this area.

In a maternal and child health program in rural Ecuador, project staff and the health promoters they trained disparaged traditional health practices in the community, discredited community midwives rather than making use of them, chose and trained only men as community health workers, used expatriates rather than local persons to train community health workers, and used M.D.s rather than paraprofessionals to a much greater extent than was necessary. The literature on rural health projects has for some time demonstrated the unsatisfactory results of programs conducted this way. There was no way for me to tell from the other evaluations whether this project was an exception or typical.

A potable water project in South Korea provides an example of the importance of the evaluator's knowing the state of the art in the sector being reviewed and explaining the project in that context. Though the project was described as innovative by AID and the PVO, it turned out that there was nothing innovative about it. Certain design aspects like metering, fire hydrants and 24-hour service had been said to be innovative, but these features were actually being used already in other such systems. In general,

the technology and equipment of the project were already standard in the country, so much so that the project was completely designed by local engineering firms. The PVO engineer in charge, moreover, had had no experience in developing countries and had made no alteration in the design. Clearly, this is not the picture of an innovative and experimental organization! That the project followed standard techniques is not reason enough, of course, to be critical of it. Though this particular evaluation report faulted the project on other grounds as well, a project using standard techniques could have also been a successful one. Again, it is hard to determine whether this South Korea project is atypical, since it is one of the few evaluations that looks at project techniques in this broader context.

Projects involving training seem particularly vulnerable to the use of outmoded or inappropriate approaches. A legal services project for poor women in Central America, for example, ran courses that gave no practical legal information, and resembled more the contents of a high-school civics class. Projects involving courses for women, as noted above, often follow approaches considered to be outmoded--i.e., reinforcing women's traditional dependent status as homemakers rather than as income-earners. Agricultural extension is an area where the teaching of outmoded or inappropriate techniques is also common, as illustrated in the following section. Finally, vocational training programs often overlook the fact that the existing



indigenous apprenticeship system is the primary vehicle for skill formation in rural non-farm industry (Chuta & Liedholm 1979:74; Anderson & Leiserson 1980:235). The vocational programs often do not do nearly as well in the formation of skills and in subsequent employment for trainees as do the existing systems; nor is the apprenticeship system taken into account in the design of the vocational program. Evaluators need to keep these existing well-functioning systems in mind.

Based on the limited evidence at hand, one can say that some PVOs, or some PVO projects, have been particularly innovative while others have been just the opposite. Until further evidence is available, then, it seems reasonable to conclude that PVOs as a group are not innovative but that some PVOs, or PVO projects, have made important innovations in certain areas. How does one explain the innovative cases? How does one explain the fact that while some PVOs are on the frontier in primary rural health care, others are not only far behind, but are using the very techniques that have been shown by the innovative PVOs to be outmoded? A striking example of this contrast is the above example of outmoded health techniques in the Ecuador project. A project of the same PVO in Bangladesh was proceeding in just the opposite way--i.e., using and generating innovative techniques in primary health care.

In cases where PVOs are using standard techniques successfully, the PVO claim to innovativeness may be just as confusing and unjust

a criterion for evaluation as is the claim to the use of participatory processes. A project that successfully extended standard techniques to new client groups would fit perfectly well within the alternative conception of PVOs as competent deliverers of certain public services.

#### Agricultural extension and rationality

A final example of a project falling behind the state of the art comes from the field of agricultural extension. A project in Ethiopia included seed-sowing demonstrations for small farmers. "Farmers traditionally randomly scatter their seed rather than plant them in rows," the report said, in explanation of the need to instruct the farmers to plant in rows. During the last ten years, an important current of literature by geographers, anthropologists and economists has shown that the "traditional" ways that peasant farmers do things has turned out to be quite rational, agronomically and economically. Other studies have demonstrated that the modern practices traditionally recommended by agricultural extension services in third-world countries have often been inappropriate--frequently resulting in decreased returns to peasant farmers or even declines in yield.<sup>1</sup> Interplanting is one of the traditional practices that has been found to make considerable agronomic and economic sense in peasant farming

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<sup>1</sup>Some excellent examples of these undesirable results in Africa can be found in the work, and works cited, of R. G. Saylor (1969 and n.d.).

systems, while the clean-row plantings recommended in the Ethiopia project have often resulted in reduced incomes and soil degradation.

Though row-planting may have for some reason been appropriate in the Ethiopia case, the burden should be on the evaluator to indicate that it is and why, given the current state of the art. The evaluation's reference to interplanting as "random scattering," and the recommended row planting, seems to place the project and its attitudes more in the 1960s than in the 1980s--or at least, in the 1980s extension services of some of the governments that PVOs would characterize as insensitive to local ways of doing things.

Agriculture is an area in which there has been considerable new research and experimentation on productivity-increasing techniques suited to small farmers without capital (e.g., Whyte & Gostyla). This new work has been inspired, to a considerable extent, by the critique of existing extension recommendations. If PVOs are more responsive to the needs of the poor than large donors, in other words, then this is one area where it should be showing up. It is among PVO projects where one would expect least to find the kind of attitudes and recommendations expressed in the Ethiopia evaluation. Since the Ethiopia evaluation was the only one, of those I read, that gave a sense of the agricultural techniques recommended, it is not clear whether this program is typical of the agricultural extension advice given out in most PVO projects.

Evaluators should look closely at the extension recommendations of PVO projects, and comment on their appropriateness in light of the new wisdom about peasant farming systems. This is not only because of the radical transformation over the last decade in thinking about the rationality of peasant agriculture, but also because some practices recommended by extension services are more appropriate to large farmers than to small ones. Thus recommended practices may have been adopted, but only among the largest farmers. Evaluators should therefore assess the distributional impact of the recommended practices. Who adopted, who did not? What were the results from those who adopted? (This does not require sophisticated income calculations.) Why did the non-adopters not adopt? Are there any economic and social differences between the adopters and the non-adopters? Is there any mechanism for spread from the adopters to the non-adopters? Or is there a natural barrier between the two, such as requirements like capital, location along a good road, landownership (vs. land tenancy), privileged access to inputs or credit?

These questions should be asked particularly in cases where there is a widespread adoption of techniques, since this kind of achievement is the exception rather than the rule. A community development project in Colombia, for example, reported a 43% adoption rate for improved agricultural techniques in one particular area. What were the techniques? What difference did they make in production

and income? Who were the adopters? the non-adopters? Were the remaining 57% non-adopters on the way to adoption too? Or had adoption reached a natural barrier? Similarly, a visitor to an agricultural research project in Guatemala reported "unheard-of-yields" in new and traditional crops using drip irrigation. Were these yields verified in the field, or only in the research station? Were the materials necessary for drip irrigation available in the area? Would their cost limit the extent to which the innovation could reach the poorest farmers? Finally, little monitoring of ex-clients of PVO projects was done by evaluators, except for the DAI evaluation of Kenya and Niger projects. This kind of monitoring is essential for gauging the success of agricultural projects.

The agricultural extension case also provides the opportunity to make a point about evaluation that applies to all projects in third-world countries. Project managers and evaluators often attribute the failure of a project to the "irrational" traditional beliefs of the poor. Thus it was for many years that the failure of many extension programs to increase agricultural production and productivity was attributed to the "irrationality" of the peasant farmer, and his resistance to accepting "modern" methods of production. Even though peasant production techniques are now understood to make considerable sense, however, the myth of the irrationality of peasant agriculture still has a strong hold among agricultural extensionists today.

To some extent, the lag in adoption by extension agencies of the "rational-peasant" view represents a certain functionality of the myth for these agencies. If peasants are irrational, that is, then considerable effort must be invested in changing their attitudes and training them to see the wisdom of the new techniques--exactly what agricultural extension does. But if peasants have serious constraints on their ability to adopt, then efforts might better be concentrated in sectors where extension agencies do not necessarily have a special expertise--e.g., provision of inputs, of credit, and of land. In many cases, extensionists have actually been on the forefront in helping small farmers in these areas, which are peripheral to their stated task; this is partly because extensionists are sometimes the only public-sector institution "occupying" the countryside. But for extension agencies to admit that their main contribution is in these other areas--and that peasants indeed respond "rationally" when you provide the conditions for them to respond--is for these agencies also to give up on their claim to specialized expertise. One does not have to be trained in agriculture, that is, in order to open up access to inputs that larger farmers already have, or to intermediate between peasant farmers and unsympathetic banks.

Another myth that has been functional to project agencies was pointed out by Allen Hoben (as cited in 124:26). Many myths about African pastoralists and pastoral systems persist, Hoben says,

because they provide a useful ideology for non-pastoralist groups, and have helped project personnel justify their own values and perceptions. He gives as an example the attitude toward range management of the range scientist, who characterizes nomadic behavior as "opportunistic" in terms of his (the scientist's) own principal concern over minimizing the risk of degradation to the environment.

Because of the functionality of many such myths about the poor to the agencies that are supposed to help them, the evaluator needs to view them with caution, and not adopt them as his own way of explaining how things turn out.

#### Small-business credit as innovative

I would like to close this discussion of innovation by focusing on an area of projects in which PVOs seem, in contrast to the above examples, to have been truly innovative--the area of credit to small businesses. Though I have not looked at any of these projects in the field, the evaluations give me the impression that the projects are doing things differently from the large donors and governments in five distinct ways:<sup>1</sup> (1) they make a judgment about the reliability of the person requesting financing, rather than about the project to be financed or the assets that back it up;<sup>2</sup> (2) they lend to groups

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<sup>1</sup>Most of the information on small-business credit in this section is taken from the ACCION International/AITEC report on investment in small capital enterprises (1980) and, to a lesser extent, Bruce (1980) and the USAID Upper Volta report on the Rural Enterprise Development project (1979).

<sup>2</sup>Not all small-business credit projects follow this approach, or completely exclude judgments about the sub-borrower's investment plans.

that are informally constituted solely for the purpose of taking credit, rather than promote the constitution of formal groups like cooperatives, with independent legal status and various purposes in addition to credit; (3) their staffs are unspecialized in credit or business, in contrast to the specialized staffs of government-sponsored credit projects;<sup>1</sup> (4) they have short repayment periods (e.g., up to six months), with frequent installment payments (sometimes daily), in contrast to the long repayment periods and infrequent repayments of the larger programs; finally, and most important, (5) these projects often show high repayment rates, in contrast to the mixed experience of government programs with credit to small farmers. The comparison of these programs to those of large donors, then, helps explain some of the elements of their success and, at the same time, provides some experimental evidence that might be used in large-donor projects.

Judging the person vs. the project. That small-business credit projects can lend on the basis of personal judgments about the reliability of a person helps to overcome one of the major causes of inequality in the distribution of credit channeled through public and private banks.<sup>2</sup> Banks usually

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<sup>1</sup>Again, this is not true of some programs, and some have a mix of generalists and specialists.

<sup>2</sup>The judgment of a credit applicant may be made by the PVO staff itself or by the leader of a small credit group, who takes responsibility for collection. In this way, project staff need not know all applicants personally in order to judge their acceptability.



require that credit recipients have co-signers or substantial collateral in the form of attachable property, which most poor applicants cannot provide. With the advent of government-sponsored "modernization" programs in agriculture, moreover, applicants have had to present an appropriate project for financing, showing a change to productivity-increasing inputs and practices and a level of projected returns adequate to repay the loan. Certain government agencies or private firms are named as specialists at preparing financeable projects. Thus an applicant has to spend money and time on getting a proposal prepared, as well as on winning the good graces of the appointed specialists, in addition to the bank. Specialists, in turn, tend to be more comfortable with those who can carry out the projects they have been trained to design--usually meaning the better-off among the applicants. The necessity of presenting a project or gaining approval for one's production techniques, then, complicates the credit-application process considerably and makes it more costly for the applicant, let alone for the financing agency; it also introduces another government unit into the picture, or another sub-group of specialists, with likes and dislikes that may not be consistent with the distributional objectives of the program.

In the small-business credit programs of PVOs, it was found that there was no relationship between the the amount of information collected on an applicant and his promptness at repayment.

This is an interesting finding in light of the importance placed by the credit programs of government institutions on the asset requirements and the project proposal of the prospective borrower. Is this approach to making credit decisions replicable on a larger scale, let alone in agriculture as opposed to the urban small-business sector? Would a larger scale destroy the ability of an agency to make such personal judgments? One PVO officer in Latin America expressed skepticism about expansion of successful small-business credit programs there, but not because of the difficulty of retaining the personal basis for judging applicants. Expansion, he said, had ruined the PVOs themselves in certain cases; with new monies, they had engaged in a flurry of new activities beyond their reach, thus neglecting and diluting the effectiveness of the original credit program.

Here is a case, then, where AID might encourage PVOs not to diversify but to use new monies instead to expand the coverage of the same activity to a broader population.

Limited groups. The success of PVO small-business programs at relying on informal groups to channel some of the credit is also worthy of note. First, reports in the literature on experiences with group credit for peasant farmers have not been very positive.<sup>1</sup> (Are there

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Adams (1978), dos Anjos et al (n.d.), Von Pischke & Rouse (1981:24, n. 24). The latter work also describes a successful exception (pp. 15-17).

reasons why group credit would work better among urban small businesses than among rural farmers?) Second, the typical approach of governments and some PVOs to forming groups through which to channel rural credit and other agricultural inputs is quite different from that of the PVO small-business programs. Most agricultural programs promote the formal constitution of large groups, mainly cooperatives, that will be able to stand on their own and engage in myriad activities like input supply, marketing, and consumer stores. These groups are meant to encompass whole communities, so that everyone who wants such services will ultimately be able to get them through the group. The results of these attempts to decentralize the supply of public-sector services in agriculture through the creation of community-run entities has not been good, particularly with respect to distributional objectives.<sup>1</sup>

The groups formed by small-business programs are just the opposite of those attempted by governments in the rural sector. They are informal and not legally constituted; there are many such groups in a particular community, each made up of a handful of persons who know and trust each other (5-8 persons); they are formed spontaneously in response to the information by project staff that this is the only way to get credit; and the group leader takes considerable responsibility

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Lele (1981).

in collecting payments from members. This process takes a considerable burden off the project agency. Under many government programs in the rural sector, in contrast, project staff spend considerable time "promoting" the formation of groups among reluctant farmers and trying to sell them on the benefits to be gained from "cooperating." In the small-business case, the groups form spontaneously, in response to the immediate availability of something they want.

The small-business approach to groups takes advantage of personal networks in the community, allowing groups to form along "natural" lines. The personal allegiances and mutual familiarities carry much of the burden of judging an applicant and achieving repayment. They also keep class or factional conflict outside the group in contrast to the community-wide groups, which are often crippled by intra-community strife and often ignore or exclude the least powerful members of the community. Public-sector agricultural programs, of course, tend to promote community-wide groups partly because they want a community entity to receive public-sector services, and many such receivers would be inefficient. As part of the hoped-for economies of scale in servicing communities, the agricultural programs encourage the groups they promote to engage in other activities--not just credit. Multiple tasks, in turn, are more demanding than single tasks, and require a more sophisticated organization; it becomes more difficult

for these promoted groups to do well because they must become competent business enterprises. In the small-business programs, the groups serve one limited purpose and are not expected to become enterprises themselves.

The findings on small-business credit are relevant not only to the attempts of governments to channel their agricultural programs through cooperatives promoted by government, but to the interest of many PVOs themselves in encouraging cooperative formation. One of the things that makes the small-business program work well, that is, seems to be the use of groups in highly circumscribed ways--quite different from the multi-purpose, large, community-wide and formally constituted groups promoted by government agricultural programs, as well as some PVOs.

Staffs without specialties. The use of unspecialized staff in small-business programs also makes for interesting comparison to government programs in the rural sector, where staffs are specialized either in agricultural extension or credit. Staffs in the evaluated projects were usually community-development experts, social workers, university students--and definitely not, in most cases, specialists in small business or credit. In fact, many small-business programs evolved out of more diffuse community development projects.<sup>1</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup> Why did this particular evolution take place? Was it because of dissatisfaction or lack of success with the more general community development approach? Or was it because communities identified such credit as something they wanted? Or was it because such a credit program seems to be a more feasible task than others? If the latter, why?

contrasts sharply to the rural credit programs for small farmers, which evolved out of existing programs of credit and other inputs to large-farm agriculture, administered through banking institutions and agricultural ministries. Their staffs were specialists in dispensing credit or teaching agricultural techniques, which usually involved working with a clientele that was better-off than and, in many cases, had interests in conflict with the poor. Providing credit to the poor, then, was often beyond the sympathies of these particular staffs and, in many cases, was even problematic for them--to the extent that they had to turn their backs on their older, better-off clientele, who felt they had a prior claim on these agencies' attentions.

The staffs of the small-business programs are quite different from these latter institutions. Their training and previous work involved poor clients (in the case of the social workers); or they were drawn to work on the project in the first place out of their commitment to distributional programs (the community-development workers and the university students). In addition to the commitment dimension of these unspecialized staffs and the lack of necessity for them to turn their backs on an earlier and higher class of clients, it is also important that these staffs had no technology to sell. This contrasts with programs of supervised credit for small farmers, with their attempts to sell more "rational" production techniques. Having no technology to sell made it possible for the small-business

programs to be less complicated than the agricultural ones and, in addition, protected the program and its clients from the contempt developed by staffers for clients who resist the specialist's recommendations.

Small loans, rapid repayment, frequent installments. The final marked difference between the small-business programs and the agricultural credit programs is the small size of the loans, the shortness of the amortization period, and the frequency at which installments fall due. Agricultural credit programs are based on the assumption that credit is a vehicle for achieving improvements in productivity, and that this can be done mainly through investment--as opposed to short-term credit for annual operating costs. These programs therefore emphasize the importance of making credit available to small farmers in large amounts, with long amortization periods; repayment is set at one or two times a year, partly in deference to the annual crop cycle. Though such programs also extend annual operating credit to farmers--in recognition of the upward bias of a purely investment-credit program--small amounts and short repayment periods are considered to be associated with a continuation of agricultural stagnation. Frequent repayment, moreover, has never been considered--because of the agricultural cycle, because there is almost no lending for off-farm activities by the poor, and because of the costs to the financing agency of receiving many small payments. Though the small amounts,

short amortization periods, and frequent installments, are the hallmarks of the small-business programs, in sum, they have never been so positively considered in the rural credit programs. Why the difference?

Small farmers often complain about long amortization periods, large loan amounts, and infrequent repayment. Extension agents or bank personnel, small farmers sometimes report, encourage them to take larger loans than they desire--or will approve the application only if it is for a larger amount and includes additional items--because a larger loan and certain investments are considered more consistent with the modernization goals of the program. In order to get credit rather than none, small farmers will often go along with these larger projects and will not do very well at undertaking or managing the investments. Hence the farmers' complaint, strange as it may seem, that they often had to take more credit than they wanted. In addition to their concern for overly large loans, farmers often express a desire for shorter amortization periods and more frequent repayment requirements. They feel they would do better under the discipline of a frequent repayment schedule, where they would have to use available funds to make partial payment, instead of having it around to spend on other things. Women, in particular, request this frequent-repayment requirement, complaining that their husbands, who control household income, will often spend amounts that should be set aside for later credit repayment on alcohol and other "frivolous" items.



In designing agricultural credit programs for small farmers, donor agencies and governments have felt they were helping small farmers by making credit available to them on the same terms already enjoyed by larger farmers--in large amounts, with long amortization periods, and with an annual or biannual repayment schedules. It is ironic, then, that these well-intended moves are experienced by some farmers as problematic, rather than helpful. Though there are many small farmers who have gained from the newly available credit, the workings of this approach to extending credit facilities may also have contributed, inadvertently, to limiting the ability of small farmers to borrow and to repay.<sup>1</sup> It is for this reason that the opposite characteristics of the small-business programs are particularly interesting and relevant. Are they transferable to rural areas?<sup>2</sup>

Costs. The relevance of the small-business credit experience to that of larger credit programs is partly dependent on cost. Are the costs of administering credit this way reasonable in comparison to public-sector and other credit programs? Costs were reported

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<sup>1</sup>The larger loans and longer repayment periods also limit the access of poorer borrowers because investment loans are more risky to banks than shorter-term working capital loans, a point made by evaluators of a public-sector program of credit to small businesses in the Philippines (Anderson & Khambata 1981:46, 167). Partly for this reason, the authors recommend more lending for working capital and less for investment.

<sup>2</sup>Von Pischke & Rouse (1981:17) do suggest that "modest" credit amounts and objectives contributed to the success of an agricultural credit program for groups in Malawi.

in the evaluations only for two cases: (1) in an El Salvador program, costs were U.S.\$30 for the first loan, and \$10 for subsequent loans, with loan size ranging between \$80 and \$200 (these data need to be reworked into a percentage share of costs in loan value so as to be able to make comparisons to other credit programs); (2) a program of credit to women in India reported costs of \$1 per loan plus 10% of the loan value, on loans between \$12 and \$36 (the percentage figure would seem to represent charges rather than costs, since loan processing costs as a percentage of loan value decrease as loan size increases because of economies of scale). An evaluation of a small-business credit program in Brazil noted that costs were 39% of loan value in the first year, and that nominal interest rates would have had to be increased from 24% to 63% to fully recover those costs (Schreiber 1975:68). Since the program is now quite successful, and under consideration for a World Bank loan, that relative cost has presumably been drastically reduced by now.

Costs to public-sector institutions in the Philippines for processing small-business loans have been reported as 2.4% to 3% of loan value--as compared to 0.4% and 0.5% for prime and near prime companies respectively (Anderson & Khambata 1981:34)--and as 3% for small business loans, in another Philippines study, and 0.5% for larger loans (Chuta & Liedholm 1979:70). How do the costs of the PVO projects compare? The few examples given above are not very

encouraging, which indicates the importance of obtaining data on the matter. Because credit is an activity where costs per beneficiary and per unit supplied are among the easiest to calculate and compare to larger public-sector operations, evaluators should routinely collect such information and try to make comparative use of it.

A final comment on the experience with small-business credit. From reading the evaluations and talking with AID staff, I have the impression that this is a category of PVO projects that is considered successful. If this is the case, then it must be that there is something about this type of project--as distinct from the PVO involved--that makes it more amenable to success. Evaluation should attempt to explain why this type of project does predictably better than others.

## VI - Evaluation: Additional Questions and Suggestions

The evaluation questions posed in the introduction to this paper are straightforward. They are the kind of questions that development social scientists have been looking into for some time, much of this research having been sponsored by large donor organizations. Why, then, the apprehension of PVOs about the ability of "outside" analysts to comprehend what they are actually doing? Some of the questions asked above, moreover, are highly consistent with PVO thinking about how projects should take place: the questions on participation and innovation require an exploration into processes and sequences of action; they require large amounts of time spent listening to people telling stories about why something happened the way it did, rather than in gathering and poring over data. Indeed, many PVO evaluations--with their emphasis on quantifying inputs rather than on asking the process questions and using the evaluation style suggested above--seem to reflect more the style of large donors than the PVO belief in process and people. This emphasis on the number of people trained, the number of meetings, the amounts of equipment supplied, etc., is just as characteristic of the evaluations performed or contracted out by the PVOs themselves as it is of the more "outside" evaluations contracted out by AID country missions, by the PVO office of AID (PVC), or done by AID staff members themselves. Part of this similarity, PVOs say, results from AID pressures on them to express their work in quantifiable terms.

Questions regarding the income distribution of participants and beneficiaries are also not inconsistent with PVO style. The small scale of many PVO projects, working frequently in only a handful of communities, makes these questions more easily and informally ascertainable than in the large projects of governments and donors. The art of rapidly assessing distributional patterns in a community has now developed to the point where statements can be made about how project benefits are distributed without doing formal survey work (e.g., Castro et al 1981). This technique--relying on easily observable proxy indicators of income such as attributes of the dwelling, numbers and kinds of livestock, etc.--can be supplemented by the evaluator with the growing body of empirical work on what income distributions look like in particular countries and regions, and what the characteristics of the poorest are. When such empirical studies exist, they are essential reading for the evaluator, enhancing her ability to rapidly discern where the project beneficiaries and participants stand in the income distribution.

Finally, with respect to PVOs and evaluation, one wonders why PVOs or their supporters have not carried out the evaluation task of chronicling their innovations--even if only for public relations purposes. No such chronicling, as Sommer (1977) notes, has been done. I make this query, and the others above, not so as to dwell on what PVOs and their evaluators have not done, but so as to help explain

why I think that certain types of questions should be asked during evaluation of PVO projects, and why evaluation exercises should be structured in certain ways.

The most obvious reasons that the PVO self-description has not led to the kinds of questions and evaluations indicated above is that these PVO themes have been more important as articles of faith than as standards of self-measurement. That participation leads to improvements in poor people's lives is an article of faith for PVOs, not a hypothesis that one is interested in testing. Most organizations have such articles of faith: organized religion does not test for the existence of a god, and large donor organizations were not interested, for many years, in testing the canon that growth in national output would automatically benefit all.

Another answer to the queries posed above is that the articles of faith in themselves put PVOs at a disadvantage in thinking about how to evaluate their own projects. The PVO articles of faith, as noted above, can be seen as a description of what these organizations are not: their strength lies in their being free of the bad qualities and values shared by large donors and other public-sector bureaucracies. Though this clear demarcation of "we" and "they" is a good way for an organization to acquire and maintain a sense of self--and though the contrast may in many ways be accurate--it also seems to keep PVO evaluators confined to the PVO world. Most PVO evaluations do

not express awareness of what has been learned through the development and research efforts of the public-sector world about the activities, the countries, and the kinds of poverty they are looking at. It is not that PVOs explicitly reject the findings from that other world-- in the way that neo-Marxist social scientists may sometimes reject the findings of "bourgeois" social science; it is, rather, that these findings are simply not known.

One does not need to be aware of the findings of public sector research and evaluations, of course, if one is doing something completely different from what the "other world" is doing and researching-- which is exactly what the PVO articles of faith claim: they are engaged in process and not task, in taking control and not in outputs, in relating to people and not to large organizations. Yet when the articles of faith are translated into the researchable questions posed above, it turns out that PVOs often do have the same concerns and are involved in the same kinds of activities that the "other world" is.

Because of the unfamiliarity of PVO evaluators with the lessons and research results of the "other world," they are often not able to discern whether particular activities are innovative in comparison to what the other world has tried to do. They are not able to determine where their participants and beneficiaries fall in the income distribution because the question, and the techniques to answer it, come out of the

other world. And they are unable to comment on the relationship between the context of the project--economic, political, agronomic, social--and its success. Ironically, the self-proclaimed otherness of PVOs makes it difficult for them to understand where their successes really lie. Just as ironic, the outside evaluators so feared by PVOs may in some cases be better able to understand and describe those successes, precisely because they are not constrained by the articles of faith and the way that they put the experience of the non-PVO world out of reach.

The insularity of the PVO evaluations is reflected in the lists of persons interviewed that is appended to each evaluation, and the written material cited. A large proportion of those interviewed represent various levels of the PVO itself--headquarters, capital city, in-country or regional office, and field personnel. Project participants are usually the only other category of interviewees, with project and community leaders dominating. There is little interviewing of non-leader beneficiaries, of community members who do not participate in the project or benefit from it, of other community organizations, of those working for government agencies in the same sector or area, or of host-country researchers with experience in the area.

The same PVO-centered approach characterizes most literature that the evaluations cite, and the general knowledge demonstrated



by the evaluator--with the exception of a handful of cases. Literature and knowledge is by and about PVO organizations, not about the world and the problems in which the project is taking place, or about the general class of problems being dealt with and the experience in dealing with them. Given the kinds of persons not interviewed, and the kinds of literature not cited, it is understandable that PVO evaluations do not give much of a feeling for the areas in which PVOs are innovative, the extent to which the decisionmaking processes they promote are participatory, and the extent to which their projects reach the poor. In short, the evaluations help little to answer the researchable questions posed at the beginning of the paper.

#### The fear and the politics of evaluation

PVO evaluations are not unique in their deficiencies--i.e., the over-exposure to the implementing organization and the lack of contact with the poor who are meant to benefit from the activity. The evaluations of large donors are often marked by the same inadequacy. Yet this inadequacy comes as less of a surprise from the large donors than from the PVOs; the inadequacy, after all, is consistent with the PVO stereotype of the large donor as ethnocentric, insensitive to local customs and values, uncaring about poor people as opposed to bureaucracies, and overconcerned with quantifiable inputs and outputs.

Though interviewing of the excluded parties noted above might be more consistent with the PVO self-image of sensitivity to local environments and local wishes, it also frightens the PVOs. They fear that the outside evaluators, with their lack of belief in the PVO approach, may talk to discontented persons with distorted pictures of the project, and then take their words as the truth. They also see evaluation as an instrument for bringing on outside control, and believe that their field people know perfectly well what is working and what is not. Some PVOs also oppose evaluation or evaluation systems because they think they represent a diversion of resources from "human needs" to high-cost evaluation activities.

PVOs fear, finally, the adverse impact that evaluation systems may have on their own organizations. One evaluator noted that a new internal monitoring system, created by the PVO in response to AID pressure, resulted in a false incentive for extension workers to show "pleasing numbers" rather than good analysis of the quality of work. The incentive to produce numbers, in turn, "bred rivalry and competition among field staff" and discouraged them from working together. This result, by the way, is not atypical; the literature on organizations has recognized for some time that monitoring and evaluation systems must tread a fine line between this "perverse" result and the output of useful evaluation information.

The fear of "objective" evaluation by outsiders is not unique to PVOs, and not just a result of their particular way of thinking about themselves. Government agencies and donors also resist evaluation, or the dissemination of evaluation results. This is because evaluations are highly political events. No matter how fair or accurate an evaluation is, no matter how much the criticism is couched in terms of general approval, evaluations can be used by an agency's political opponents to make moves against it. This political danger of evaluations may be greater when projects in one country are evaluated by researchers or organizations from another country, who are less sensitive or vulnerable to the potential political repercussions of an honest evaluation. From the political point of view, in other words, a highly objective and fair evaluation can be the most dangerous kind for an organization. This politically problematic aspect of evaluation operates for PVOs as well as for other organizations, since they see evaluations as affecting their chances for future funding and their continued reception by host-country governments.

Given the political dimension of evaluation, it is no surprise that organizations are loathe to institutionalize their own monitoring and evaluation systems, with their outputs of written results readable by others. It is also understandable that when organizations do sponsor their own evaluations, they often tend to serve public-relations rather than information-gathering purposes. One might expect to

find, moreover, that some organizations would have well-functioning systems of informal self-evaluation, without ever having that capacity reflected on paper.

An interesting example of the political dimension of evaluation is to be found in the reaction of PVOs and their supporters to the comparative evaluation by DAI of some PVO programs in Kenya and Niger. One of the major findings of the evaluation had important implications for the ways PVOs worked: the PVOs did best, it was found, in projects where they made only marginal inputs to an activity or a group that was already underway. Those PVOs that tried to do more--to start from scratch, to supply many inputs and processes--did less well.<sup>1</sup> Since many PVOs do much more than provide the last piece of an activity, one could expect this finding to have been disliked by PVOs and their supporters. Though PVOs were unhappy with the evaluation, however, their discontent focused on something completely different: the fact that the study had ranked various PVOs by name, indicating that some were better than others. Even those PVOs that did well in the ranking were unhappy about it, objecting to the principle of comparing the performance of one member of the PVO community to another.

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<sup>1</sup>It is interesting that this finding is consistent with that of the Kramer (1981) study of PVOs working in very different settings than those of the third world. The successful programs, in the Kramer study, were usually "small-scale, non-controversial, and incremental, if not marginal, extensions or improvements..." (p. 178). A study of 11 United National technical-assistance projects came to a similar conclusion: successful projects usually "addressed a situation where only one ingredient is missing" (Kilby 1979:321). The author reported the same finding from the literature on comparable technical assistance ventures in depressed urban areas of the United States (p. 322).

The objection of even the well-rated PVOs to the principle of ranking is not only a testimony to the political cohesiveness of the PVO community in the United States. More important, it shows how the ranking represented a more immediate threat to individual PVOs than the finding that PVOs in general tended to be less successful at certain types of activities. Even though this latter finding could have serious long-term implications for PVOs--since many of them engage in the type of broad-gauged intervention believed by DAI to do less well--the ranking represented a more concrete threat to specific organizations.

It should be noted, finally, that less threatening types of findings--focusing on the success of certain activity types and organizational styles rather than on the performance of specific PVOs--are more likely to emerge from analysts with a broad range of experience with all kinds of development projects, and with experience in comparative analysis. This type of analysis, in short, may be best done by those who, because they are outside the PVO world, are somewhat insensitive to the quirks and personalities of individual PVOs.

#### After construction

In this and the following section, I would like to emphasize two other areas that need attention in PVO evaluations. This section deals with the operational phase of construction projects and the following one with income-earning projects.

Most projects involving construction or supply of equipment begin to have difficulties once the structure or the equipment is in place. The problems are proverbial: tubewells that fall into disrepair, potable water that is contaminated, recently completed water systems that fall into disrepair at the same time that new systems are being built, latrines that nobody uses except to impress visiting dignitaries, roads that are not maintained, electrified health clinics without refrigerators, and meeting halls without meetings.<sup>1</sup>

Despite our familiarity with the problematic nature of the transition from construction to operation, most PVO evaluations do not look into the post-construction phase, and focus instead on the completion of construction as the project's final output--the community built the road, or put in the latrines, or sunk the well. The evaluation of a project in Ethiopia is a typical example: the project succeeded in constructing rat-proof grain storage, it is reported, but there is no indication as to how the storage facilities were used, by whom, and whether they actually turned out to be rat-proof. Similarly,

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<sup>1</sup>From the point of view of the South Korean villagers, the meeting halls without meetings were not considered a failure. Most of the meeting halls built under the project ended up being used for storage or for living quarters, and not for meetings. The villagers, however, looked at the physical existence of their meeting hall as a symbol of modernization, and thus with great pride, regardless of whether the hall was actually used for meetings. Should this be considered a failure? Or is community pride an achievement in itself? Here is another case where participation by the community or community leaders leads to results that are not very compatible with what development agencies, including PVOs, think is good for the poor.

the report notes that other items successfully materialized--latrine covers, cupboards for keeping household utensils off the ground, and facilities for farm-tool construction--but there is no indication of whether these items were used, let alone of the impact of use.

Construction projects seem to be among the easiest of community undertakings. The evaluator of the South Korea program reported that communities were always quite good at joint construction efforts, but not at what should come after. The evaluator of a similar project in Colombia noted that construction always went well, was usually completed ahead of schedule, and that more structures were usually built than planned for. Another evaluator of the same project, and a similar one in Honduras, also noted the easy achievement with construction projects, particularly when compared to the less successful income-earning projects. If a project meets its construction targets, then, this is less surprising than if the project succeeds in making the transition to the post-construction phase.

If communities are frequently good at construction and not at what comes after, what explains the cases where the transition is successful? Are there any lessons to be learned about the comparative advantages and disadvantages that communities have at various tasks--or stages of them--and what this means for project design? Here is another case, by the way, where the PVO emphasis on process as opposed to task obscures the issue: it is difficult to reconcile

the emphasis on community decisionmaking as an end in itself with the finding that communities are good at some things and not at others.

Some tasks may suffer less from post-construction problems than others. In some cases, this will be because the type of project itself needs less post-construction attention than others--such as churches or soccer fields. In other projects, community reaction to post-construction problems may lead to their resolution; an example is the school without a teacher that leads to community self-taxing to supply a teacher, or to successful community pressure on the ministry of education to supply a teacher. Why does the post-construction problem generate this kind of reaction and resolution in some schoolbuilding projects and not in others? In still other projects, there may be no such built-in mechanisms for getting through the post-construction phase; examples are contamination of new water sources, or lack of use of latrines. In both these examples, the community may not perceive the post-construction inactivity as a problem. This could mean that a "top-down" type of intervention during the post-construction phase is more indicated than in the previous category of projects.

Construction, in sum, can afford more to be taken for granted than transitions to operation. These operating phases of projects cannot afford to be neglected, in turn, since operating costs account



for two thirds of the costs in the social sectors--i.e., nutrition, education, health and water (Burki 1981:69). When evaluators look at projects involving construction, then, they need to keep the following thoughts in mind: (1) that community construction projects are "easy" and not in themselves a sign of completion; (2) that post-construction problems are the rule rather than the exception, and they should be known about beforehand and watched for; and (3) that successful transitions from construction to operation deserve special attention, in order to understand what brought the transition about.

#### Income-earning projects

Income-earning projects seem to be as difficult as construction projects are easy. Though these projects have in the past represented a small share of PVO projects, they are now on the increase because of the change in emphasis from relief to development. As noted above, the evaluation of community development projects in Colombia and Honduras reported that the income-earning projects did poorly, in contrast to the success of the community construction projects. A community development expert in Egypt, and member of the advisory board to the local office of a U.S. PVO working there, noted that the difficulties inherent in income-earning projects made literacy, preschool, and bilharzia projects look relatively easy.

The evaluator of a project in the Philippines questioned the economic importance of the income-earning projects--fish ponds,

small gardens, pig dispersal, sewing skills. The evaluator of a community development project in Jamaica questioned the economic wisdom of the project's promotion of wicker production, in that the Kingston craft market was already "inundated" with straw and wicker products. In Egypt, the same PVO had promoted the initiation of income-earning activities in brick manufacture, marmalade processing and fish farms, with the goal of increasing local employment opportunities. At the time of evaluation, however, these projects were undergoing various difficulties and had had little impact on employment.

The income-earning activities of the above examples are a common feature of community development projects; so is the skepticism expressed by the evaluators of the last two examples. Why is it, then, that these activities continue to be standard features of many rural projects? Perhaps the persistence of these activities is more an expression of the routine behavior of organizations than of the inherent value of the activities. Or, perhaps the PVO projects are exceptions to the rule. Whatever the case, it is important that evaluators go beyond the listing of income-earning activities that were promoted, and try to determine their viability and impact. What differences have the activities made to their owners, and to the community? Are the activities able to sustain themselves without the PVO's presence? Where do the participants fall in the income distribution?

Income-earning projects, finally, may be more difficult than community works projects because the community, with the latter project, has more control over inputs and outputs. The income-earning project, in contrast, may be too dependent on things determined outside the community--prices, markets, input supply, transport. If this is the case, then income-earning projects may work only when more variables than usual are within local control, or when project organization is different than that for works projects. When income-earning projects do work, then, it is important that evaluators try to get a sense of the circumstances that contributed to the success, in order to be able to answer some of the questions posed above.

#### Doing evaluation

My comments on PVO evaluations thus far have focused on certain issues that I felt were important, or were being neglected, or were being misunderstood. Part of the inadequate treatment of these issues in PVO evaluations, I believe, results from the way evaluators are going about their work, and the priorities they are placing on various kinds of information and informants. In this section, I would like to suggest certain ways of working in the field, and certain lines of questioning, that may help to yield more information on the issues discussed in this paper.

Success and failure. The evaluator should treat any successes she runs across with a sense of awe. She should not be content to say that something worked, but should also attempt to explain why it worked, even if the attempt is speculation.

Most successful projects will be only partly so. The most important part of the project may be a resounding success, but there may also be a failure that is just as resounding. It is very important to give a differentiated picture of the project, rather than an "on the average" picture of success or failure. A contrasting of the parts that are working well to those that are not will contribute to an understanding of what made the success in one area, and prevented its realization in another. Often, the strengths that give rise to success in one area turn into impediments in the other, so the failure is a very logical outcome of the success--or vice versa. The picture of success and failure should also be presented through time, as well as in time. The evaluator should ask many questions about the history of the project--the false starts, the changes of course, the unanticipated events. He should ask PVO staff and community participants what they do differently than they did before, and why. Interviewing for history in this way will reveal to the evaluator what lessons were learned along the way, which are usually buried in the altered project. Much of what the evaluator will learn about what works and what does not will come from this retrospective, in addition to his perspective on how things are working currently.

Evaluators should be on the alert for unanticipated success. Success in ways that had not been planned may be obscured by the fact that the project failed in its stated objectives. An indigenous PVO in India, for example, organized a social education course for destitute women (Coombs 1981:27). The primary emphasis of the course was on literacy, but some craft training was also included. The literacy part failed for the "usual reasons," but the craft training turned out to be very popular. It led the PVO to move one step further, moreover, and to provide assistance in gaining access to raw materials, credit and markets. Much of what there is to learn about how projects work will be revealed through a search for these unanticipated events.

Evaluators should be aware of recurrent problems in certain areas--e.g., faulty maintenance, lack of coordination between cooperating entities, lack of funds for operating costs after construction, schools without teachers, health clinics without equipment. Similarly, certain types of successes are also more frequent than others--e.g., community cooperation in the construction of facilities like meeting halls, health clinics, feeder roads. The evaluator should attempt to explain what is happening in the project against this general background of what is predictable and what is a surprise. If there is a lack of coordination between government agencies, then little time should be spent on describing the problem because it is so familiar and there are good reasons for it. If coordination is achieved, then

a lot of time should be spent explaining how that happened, since it is so unusual. Similarly, if a road does not get maintained, not much time should be spent deploring it. Instead, attention should be paid to the community reaction to the lack of maintenance, and what direction it is moving in. Again, if a case of maintenance is found, considerable attention should be devoted to explaining why it happened.

In trying to explain success and failure, evaluators should not stop at explanations relating to the quality of the program leader. When success is attributed to the quality of leadership, this tends to obscure the fact that some projects do well even with mediocre leadership, or that certain types of projects are more apt to attract good leaders than others. Though the evaluator should be attentive to leadership, then, he should also keep in mind the importance of setting this leadership in its more general context. This approach will yield results that are more useful for making comparative statements about projects.

Success is sometimes facilitated by a certain sequence by which events or activities took place, rather than by a certain constellation of factors at any one moment in time. Successful community organizations, for example, often start out their group existence by organizing around a discrete, immediate and temporary task--like construction of a road, or resistance to eviction. Evaluators should be alert for such sequences.

The world of the project. Evaluators should consider the unit of observation to be the community or area where the project takes place, and not the PVO. This means that interviews with PVO headquarters and staff will have to be counterbalanced with interviews with those outside the PVO world--community leaders, other project beneficiaries, those who do not participate, and others like banks, government agencies, universities and the researchers who work in that particular area or on that particular set of problems. These non-PVO interactions are crucial to an understanding of how the project fits in its environment. Gaining a sense of who the non-beneficiaries are will be part of this understanding of the impact of the project and the distribution of its benefits. Contacts with other institutions are important for learning how well the project is doing compared to other efforts of this nature, and where the project strategy fits in the evolution of attempts to deal with this problem, both generally and in this particular area. In order to force the context of the evaluation out of the PVO world and into the project world, it may be necessary to hire evaluators or consultants to evaluators whose links to the context are stronger than their links to the PVO--anthropologists who have experience in the area, local persons who have lived there.

It is important for evaluators to not only record what the project has done, but also to go and look at these activities. If the project has promoted kitchen gardens, for example, then the evaluator should

spend time looking at them with the women who control them--listening to an explanation of the various plants, trying to find out what impact the garden has made on family income and nutrition. If the project has built a health clinic, then the evaluator should hang around there for a substantial amount of time, watching to see how people are attended, what problems arise and how they are resolved. If the project has built rat-proof storage, the evaluator should be seeing it with the persons who have the storage. Whatever the activity, the evaluator cannot rely on written or staff reports to verify that certain things have happened and have had certain impacts. Much can be learned about the way a project has worked simply by asking questions at the site of the structure or activity for which the project is responsible.

Evaluators should not rely completely on the project input and output data as a proxy for what the project has accomplished. Data on training classes given, number of persons attending, equipment in place, etc., cannot substitute for an assessment of whether the classes have made a difference in the lives of people in the community, and of what impact the equipment is having. Though such causal relationships may be difficult to get at without doing formal survey work, much can be learned by tracking down a handful of people who have participated in the courses and spending time with them--as well as with a handful of those who have not participated. Precisely because it is not



easy to establish the impact of training, these particular features of development projects seem to get away with a lot less scrutiny than other projects--like bridges, for example, which will fall down if they are not built right. Certain types of training courses, therefore, have become standard features of certain kinds of projects, and in many cases may be useless or even inappropriate. Evaluators should be attentive to this problem and should, if possible, sit in on some of the courses.

For many projects, it is quite difficult to assess impact. Health and education are examples. Yet in the case of some, like health, it is generally accepted that a project that provides a service well is, by definition, a good thing. Evaluators can rely on the large amount of field research in this area to gain an idea of what is currently considered the best way to proceed at supplying the service. The problems of supplying health services to the poor sensitively, effectively and economically are so great that when a project accomplishes this, one does not have to worry too much about establishing a sophisticated proof of causal impact--as long as one knows, from the literature and other experiences in the field, what kinds of actions tend to have the right impacts. Thus in an area like health, where there is a strong consensus that the poor will benefit more from this kind of project than from many others (aside from the fact that they themselves give it high priority), the evaluator can concentrate on assessing

the extent to which project services reach the target population. Impressionistic data on the relationship between the new health service and the incidence of disease will always be helpful, but the evaluator need not feel that "nothing can be done" because of the impossibility of quantitatively assessing impact. (Potable water is a similar case where the evaluator will usually not be able to assess the impact of a particular water project on the incidence of disease; but she can make an important contribution by finding out about the percent of the population covered, the quality of the water and, that greatest of problems, the maintenance of the water site and its equipment. Adequate coverage of these areas will often give the information necessary to speculate intelligently about impact.)

Finally, it is very important for the evaluator to talk to ex-clients of a project. The ex-clients will feel more at liberty to talk openly about the project and its role in their lives; the greater lapse of time since their participation in the project, moreover, will make it possible to gain a longer-term perspective on the nature and the permanence of the project's impact. Just as ex-clients are important to interview, so are ex-PVO members and ex-community managers of projects.

## Conclusion

The questions for evaluation raised throughout this paper fall into one of three categories:

- (1) how is decisionmaking being made, and what groups are being excluded, if any;
- (2) who is benefiting from project activities, and where do the beneficiaries fall in the income distribution; and
- (3) what is the project doing that works well, and what is not.

In exploring these questions, the evaluator should be attentive to three additional dimensions, which cut across the topics stated above. Briefly, they are:

- (1) the nature of tasks and activities in terms of their compatibility with
  - (a) certain decisionmaking processes (participatory or arbitrary);
  - (b) certain benefit distributions (equitable vs. skewed); and
  - (c) certain degrees of control (decentralized, centralized, specialist, non-specialist);
- (2) the relationship of what the PVO is doing to the state of the art in that particular sector, and in that particular country, and
  - (a) whether the project is innovative (doing things differently and with better results than they are usually done); or
  - (b) whether it is using a standard approach to extend services to a new client group;
- (3) the nature of the relation between PVO and government, and how it explains the success or failure of what the PVO is doing: whether there is

- (a) a division of labor, in which case the comparative advantage of each entity should be described;
- (b) brokerage, where the PVO intermediates between the poor and the government;
- (c) competition or substitution, where the PVO is duplicating what the government is doing or even getting in its way;
- (d) replication, where the government is learning from the PVO experience and copying or adopting PVO programs as its own; or
- (e) no relationship at all.

### Suggestions to Evaluators

The following set of suggestions for evaluators is meant to help them get at the issues raised in this paper. Many of them are obvious, but have been included because the evaluations done so far have usually not yet yielded this kind of information. Some of the suggestions are repeated from the text of the paper; others follow directly from arguments in the text. The questions are divided into five categories, even though many do not fit neatly in one category or another; some of the questions in certain categories are elaborations of questions raised in previous categories.

#### Participation, benefit distribution, innovation, cost

1. Locate the participants and the beneficiaries of the PVO activity in the income distribution of the community, approximately by thirds. Elaborate on how the benefits and results of the PVO activity are distributed among dwellers in the area. (Further questions elaborated below.)
2. Learn the history of community decisions and acts that took place up to and during the PVO activity. Find out to what extent existing community groups were included in project decisionmaking, and to what extent the poorest groups participated--the landless, women, ethnic or social outcast groups, temporary (vs. permanent) workers, land tenants (vs. owners), small (vs. large) owners, etc. (Further questions below.)
3. Did indigenous organizations exist prior to the project? Among the poorest too? How were they included in project decisionmaking? If not, why?
4. Find out what innovations or experimentation have resulted from the PVO's presence. What have been the changes in course, if any, and what were the results of these changes?
5. Estimate the cost of the activity, separating out person-hours and their costs from other contributions; use this information to make estimates of cost per beneficiary, per-input, or per-output; compare these estimates to those for public-sector projects of a similar nature.
6. If decisionmaking is not particularly participatory, are there ways of making it more so? Does project history show that decision-making is more participatory now than it was originally? How was this accomplished?

7. Are there certain project tasks or activities that are not as suited to participatory decisionmaking as others? That is, does participation result in less effective project outcomes in some cases? What are the tasks that seem better suited? less well suited? Why?
8. When decisionmaking is in the hands of local elites and therefore non-representative, do the excluded groups nevertheless benefit? In situations of elite control are there some activities where excluded groups benefit regardless of elite control, and other activities for which elite control results in mainly elite beneficiaries?
9. Do some activities seem more appropriable by elites than others--e.g. fertilizer supply vs. health-clinic services?
10. Does the project exclude elites from decisionmaking or benefits in any way? If so, how were they bypassed? Some examples are activities in which the elites have no interest, low-status activities, class-based organizations from which elites are naturally excluded--like women's organizations, tenants' unions, labor unions, etc.
11. What aspects of the project, if any, seem to be reaching the poorest stratum of the population? Why are these activities, as distinct from the others, able to reach the poorest? What is the nature of the relation between the PVO and the poorest in these particular activities--participatory, "enlightened" top-down?
12. By reading country-specific studies on income distribution, and by talking with local people, find out how to identify the poorest groups--e.g., lowest caste. casual laborers, women, etc. Seek them or their representatives out to ascertain how they are being affected by the project.
13. Watch for examples of, or opportunities for, targeting on the poor by type of activity--e.g., low-status activities and goods, absence of elite interest in participation in the activity, class-based organizations, etc. Are these opportunities being exploited, and if not, how might they be?
14. To gauge the degree of representativeness of local participation in the project, find out about the history of some important issues and how they were resolved. One evaluation, for example, chronicles the history of some suggestions made by a group of coop members to its board, and how and why those suggestions were overridden.

15. With respect to project activities involving women, determine to what extent they augment women's income-earning capacities and other forms of power, and to what extent they reinforce women's traditional role as homemaker. If the latter is the case, make suggestions as to what changes in project design would be appropriate.

16. Where there is a community contribution to projects, ascertain its distributional burden. For example, voluntary labor might fall disproportionately on the poor while contributions in cash or kind might fall disproportionately on the rich.

### Impact

17. Give some idea of the importance of the project in the region or country--percent of the population affected, percent of project expenditures in relation to total government expenditures in the sector, percent of the goods provided in the country or by the public sector (e.g., health clinics, fertilizers, seeds, credit, schools, standpipes, trained specialists, etc.). To save time, use the national or regional-level figures for comparison that can usually be found together in national five-year plans, annual economic reports, or economic surveys carried out by the World Bank.

18. Much of the impact of these projects will be discovered through institutional history rather than data. This requires being alert to the history of the project in the community and the area--what was accomplished, what chain reactions were set off (in prices, in private-sector behavior, in town politics, in public sector responses). It is not necessary to catalogue what has happened in all these areas; rather, in asking questions and listening to histories, one should be sensitive to the possibilities of finding impact in one of these ways. Don't ask people what the impact was; ask, rather, "what happened" and then ask, "what happened next?"

19. If benefits have gone mainly to elites, try to determine which category the case belongs to: (1) the poor are also benefited, through a trickle-down or spread effect (describe this indirect mechanism); (2) the poor are harmed (as in the case of subsidies for large livestock, resulting in the eviction of cropping tenants); and (3) the poor are not affected one way or another.

### Training and extension

Many projects involve teaching people new ways of doing things--nutrition education, agricultural extension, vocational training, etc. A series of questions should be asked about these teaching projects.

20. Are the "new ways" appropriate, in light of the current literature on or experience with this sector?
21. What was the extent of adoption of the new ways among those who received assistance or training?
22. What was the difference between adopters and non-adopters, or participants and non-participants, in terms of income, occupation, sex, and landholding status?
23. What was the extent of adoption among non-participants, through the demonstration effect? This question relates closely to impact, since training can have a considerably larger impact if the non-participants copy what the participants are doing--i.e., if there are "spread" effects.
24. If there was "spread" from adopters to non-adopters, or participants to non-participants, find out what the mechanism of the spread was.
25. Is there a natural barrier to spread, such as requirements like capital, location along a good road, landownership (vs. land tenancy or landlessness), privileged access to inputs or credit?
26. Are certain aspects of training or extension more apt to be picked up by non-participants than others? E.g., seeds that one can grow on one's own and then pass along to neighbors--in contrast to hybrid seeds that have to be bought each year, or other agricultural innovations that require close supervision by extensionists or capital and other inputs not accessible to many.
27. When people adopt the new ways, what is the result for their lives and their incomes? Sophisticated data are not necessary; ask the people what difference the new practice made in their lives; don't ask only the project staff.
28. Of those participants who did not adopt the new ways, find out why. Were their income constraints? Irrelevance to their lives or



production activities? Inappropriateness of the recommendations? Try to avoid traditional explanations of non-adoption that point to "ignorance" or "lack of understanding" on the part of the participant.

### The public sector

Adoption and amplification by the public sector of PVO ideas, approaches, and programs is an area of large potential impact of PVO projects. The interactions of public-sector entities with PVO activities--and the reflections of public-sector managers and technicians about these activities--are therefore a very important area of observation. Public-sector response is also important for determining whether the PVO is playing an innovative or "precursor" role.

29. What has the public sector been doing in this particular activity or sector, if anything? How does the PVO activity differ from what the public sector is doing? Try to explain the difference.

30. Thinking about the PVO-government relationship can be organized into one or more of the following categories: (1) complementarity, (2) filling unoccupied territory, (3) replication or diffusion, (4) government takeover, (5) competition or substitution, and (6) brokerage. Place the project in the relevant category, and try to elaborate on the relationship and its effect on the project, its relevance to project goals (e.g., projects designed to provide technical assistance or new inputs may instead be providing brokerage between the poor and government institutions).

31. If the project involves interdependence with a public-sector entity, find out in what ways the cooperation is working well, and in what areas badly. Suggest an explanation for the variation in the experience. Be sure to get at least as much information on the question from public-sector persons as from the PVO. Does it seem that certain activities are more conducive to successful cooperation than others? Why?

32. In the cases of interdependence, is there a division of labor between PVO and government that works particularly well? Does the PVO seem to have a particular comparative advantage in one area and the government in another?

33. In the cases of public-sector interactions, pay attention to the commitment of the public-sector entity to serving and working with this particular client group. Is it high or low? Pay particular attention to field staff, and their interactions with the client group.

34. Interviews with relevant public-sector managers and technicians are also important even when the project has little relation to the public sector. Find out whether these persons have found the PVO to be doing something interesting, to be a problem, to be relevant, etc.
35. Interpret PVO complaints about governments with care, and learn both sides of the story.
36. Try to distinguish between what is good for the PVO organization, and what is good for project impact. If a PVO project is successful, the government may want to copy it; if the PVO is so successful that it is becoming too important in a particular sector, the government may feel that this is politically undesirable. Governments, that is, may sometimes make things difficult for PVOs, or crowd them out, because PVOs have been so successful that the government wants to take over. From an impact point of view, many such cases may be characterized as successes, even though they may represent problems or failure from the PVO's point of view.
37. In cases where there are successful transitions from PVOs to governments, try to understand what made the PVO able to manage the transition. Has the government tried to take advantage of the PVO experience, or has it instead discredited it. Why?
38. At a more general level, be alert to the effect of national economic policies and political environments on the PVO project. Do certain economic policies overwhelm the effects of the political environment--for good or for bad--or vice versa?

#### Success and failure, achievements and problems

39. The evaluator should treat any successes with a sense of awe. Do not be content to say that something worked well, but venture an explanation as to why it worked. Explain what is happening in the project against a background of what is predictable and what is a surprise.
40. Be alert to the possibility that certain project components or tasks may work well consistently across different project sites and countries while certain others consistently do poorly. Try to explain the reasons for the pattern.
41. Approach the pattern of problems and achievements through time, in addition to gaining an understanding of the current moment

in time. Ask questions about the history of the project--false starts, changes of course, unanticipated events. Ask PVO staff and community participants what they do differently now than they did before, and why.

42. Don't hold organizations to their stated objectives, especially if they seem to be doing well in other areas. First look open-endedly at what the organization has accomplished, regardless of its objectives; then compare the reality and the objectives. Does the reality shed any light on the objectives?

43. Be on the alert for unanticipated success. Such achievements may be obscured by the fact that the project failed in its stated objectives.

44. In trying to explain success and failure, try to go beyond explanations having to do with the quality of the program leader. Some types of projects are more apt to attract good leaders than others; some types of projects do well even with mediocre leadership. Think about whether the project type itself has contributed to program outcomes, in other words, and explain what it is about this project type or task that makes it more amenable to success (or failure).

45. Related to the above suggestion is the fact that certain problems experienced by projects are recurrent and therefore not a surprise--e.g., faulty maintenance, lack of coordination between agencies, lack of funds for operating costs, schools without teachers, health clinics without doctors. Be aware of what these recurrent problems are in the type of project under observation. If the problems are occurring, spend relatively little time in exploring and explaining why they occur--since they are to be expected. Instead, look for cases where the expected problems are not occurring, and then try to explain why they did not appear.

46. The discussion of problems or problem projects should be set in a broader context of why this particular problem might or might not be characteristic of this particular type of project or project setting. Attention should be focused, in other words, not only on what the PVO did that went wrong, or on what went wrong in the circumstances surrounding this particular project.

47. When looking at projects involving construction, keep in mind the following: (a) post-construction problems are the rule rather than the exception, and they should be known about beforehand and watched for; and (b) successful transitions from construction to operation deserve special attention, and an attempt should be made to understand what brought the transition about.

48. A companion to the above suggestion is that certain types of successes are more frequent than others--e.g., community cooperation in the construction of facilities. Achievements in these latter areas come as less of a surprise, and therefore require less elaboration than achievements in areas where success is less common.

49. Successes are sometimes facilitated by the sequence by which certain events or activities take place, rather than by a certain constellation of factors at any one time. Be aware of these sequences of project development through time, and think about whether they are associated with achievements or problems.

50. Be alert to the possibility that some achievements are made by project organizations that look disorderly or in other ways deficient as organizations. Don't let the disorderliness of the organization obscure its achievements. Be alert to the possibility, moreover, that certain achievements will have been made because of the disorderliness of the organization, and not despite it. Judge the PVO not only on its completeness as an organization, in other words, but by the quality of its project. The project may be good, though the organization looks bad. Try to explain this.

#### Fieldwork style and other suggestions

51. Consider the unit of observation to be the community or the area where the project takes place, and not the PVO.

52. Do not rely heavily on project input and output data as the main source for what the project has accomplished. If the project has carried out a series of training courses, for example, attend the courses, talk to the participants, go to their homes. If the project has promoted kitchen gardens, go and look at the gardens and talk to their owners.

53. Make an assessment of the competence of project staff, in terms of their training, experience, language ability, and commitment.

54. Pay just as much attention to junior and field staff as to managers. Junior field staff of projects are often neglected in interviewing. Yet they often have more contact with and understanding of beneficiaries than persons in managerial positions. They also will often have good ideas about how the project might be improved, what the source of its problems are, and the nature of the project's impact on households and on the region. Their ideas and perceptions are often unexpressed because of hierarchical patterns and deference

to authority in office meetings. Try to talk with these persons, therefore, away from the office. The best opportunity for this is to take jeep trips with these persons to visit faraway beneficiaries or project sites. Much can also be learned about project staff and their style with beneficiaries by doing some interviewing of beneficiaries with project staff accompanying or participating.

55. Ask project managers and staff what information they would find useful from an evaluation. What are the questions, perplexities, and contradictions they face that make it difficult for them to proceed as they would like?

56. Be careful not to accept the assumptions behind project design as truths--e.g., that vocational training per se accomplishes its purpose of increased opportunities for employment. Similarly, do not accept achievement of project outputs as prima facie evidence of achievement of project objectives--e.g. number of participants trained should not be accepted as a proxy for achievement of the employment objective. Do not assume that agricultural extension automatically leads to increased production and therefore is good in itself; do not assume that nutrition training automatically leads to changed habits; do not assume, when habits do change, that the changed habit automatically leads to better-nourished and more healthy families; do not assume that vocational training automatically leads to employment. Do not use project outputs, in sum, as a proxy for indicating the achievement of project objectives.

57. Much of what is to be learned about the project will come from interviews and not documents--in the community, and not in the project office. Since interviews take so much time, evening hours should be taken advantage of. They represent an opportunity for learning about the project by "hanging around" in the communities where the project takes place, eating and drinking with local people or local staff.

58. Interviews with community members who participate or benefit from a project are just as important as interviews with project staff. Similarly, interviews with community members who do not participate or benefit from the project are equally important as those with participants or beneficiaries.

59. In assessing project outputs and achievements, pay less attention to what people and organizations say they intend to do than to what has actually happened. Information about intentions is not helpful for judging an organization because the intentions may or may not come true.

60. Make a special effort to talk to ex-clients or ex-participants of a project. They will have a longer experience, a more reflective

view, and a different perspective. Ex-staff members or managers, moreover, will often feel free to talk more openly, and will have had more time and distance to be reflective about their experience.

61. Do not give up on assessing impact because there is not enough time to do an adequate quantitative assessment, or because the time and the data do not allow establishing causality between the project and what has happened. As a proxy, ask beneficiaries and community members how their lives are different as a result of the project. This will give some indicators of impact, or at least of clues to pursue.

62. Be sure to know the state of the art in the sector you are evaluating. Use this knowledge to comment on the extent to which the project is innovative, is following the latest wisdom on the subject, or is using approaches that the current wisdom has proven to be inappropriate.

Suggestions to the  
Office of Private and Voluntary Cooperation (PVC)

1. I would suggest a field evaluation of a group of projects for which the PVO is no longer operating--either in that particular community, or in that particular country. Ideally, the PVO should have left the community at least one or two years before evaluation. This type of evaluation is essential to determining the impact of PVOs on the building of local institutions.
2. One way of deciding how to divide project- or PVO-specific from issue-oriented evaluations is to determine which questions are tough for anyone but a specialist to get at, or which questions will yield data that are not good enough for comparative purposes unless collected and analyzed by a specialist. One obvious example is the question of cost, and how PVOs compare in cost to large-donor activities in similar areas. For researching this task, it is essential to contract a highly trained economist who already has done work in this area, and who has access to public-sector data on these types of costs. This kind of person might not be able to handle adequately other kinds of evaluation questions posed above, so that is one criterion for doing the cost question as issue-oriented. Such a contractor should finish the task with a simple set of questions about cost that can be asked by non-specialist evaluators in future project evaluations. In this way, comparable data will be coming in subsequent to the cost evaluation. Alternatively, the original cost study in itself might provide sufficient information on PVO costs relative to costs of public-sector entities.
3. PVC should take advantage of the large investment made by the World Bank in computing the costs of project implementation and project development, as well as in other areas, such as the costs of administering small-business-enterprise programs. Consultants should check with Bank staff about their methodology, so that their own findings can be compared to a ready-made set of previous findings about other such programs (e.g., if the PVO cost is a certain percentage of total loan value in a credit program, how does this compare to experience with other entities?) PVC resources will not permit that the evaluator ask the full range of questions and do the comprehensive analysis that the World Bank can do. But comparability for a handful of important figures and percentages would be extremely useful, involving little extra effort on PVC's part. Indeed, the Bank might be interested in broadening its own findings by including the PVC findings in its own comparative analysis.

4. PVC should embark on a few sector evaluations--perhaps health and feeding/nutrition education, for reasons discussed momentarily. In the sector evaluations, the questions raised in my paper can be explored and "tested," so that one can get not only project-specific answers to the questions (e.g., this project was more participatory than that), but so as to get a baseline of answers to the questions with respect to a particular sector. This baseline of impressions about the sector can then serve as backdrop for subsequent project evaluations--outside the sector as well as within.

I suggest health and feeding/nutrition for the following reasons (there may be other areas that also fit these criteria):

- a) Many PVOs work in these areas.
- b) Many PVOs in these areas are specialized in this one particular sector and have not diversified (yet) into other sectors, like agriculture, resulting in multi-component projects that make evaluation more complicated.
- c) Many of the PVOs in these sectors have evolved out of the relief mode; there would therefore be much to be learned from the long experience in one area, and there would be a natural framework for eliciting such information--i.e., how does your relief experience bear on what you are doing now? what do you do now differently than you did (or do) under the relief orientation, and why?
- d) There is a large literature about these areas and about projects of this nature, and therefore plenty of state-of-the-art information. Projects can therefore be judged in terms of the state of the art more easily than in an area where there is less literature.
- e) These areas, I would suspect, are those in which PVOs have been more significant in terms of their share of such services in host countries, or in terms of total AID monies channeled through PVOs.
- f) Since health (and nutrition?) are the areas where working relationships with governments seem to be most common, it is in these areas where potential for spread effects through government amplification is important.

5. Frequent PVC monitoring actions and demands may not be consistent with why AID uses PVOs in the first place. A system of monitoring and evaluation should be consistent with AID's reasons for channeling money through PVOs--i.e., because they are said to be good at being left on



their own and getting things done. This could mean a low frequency of monitoring interventions and demands, for example, combined with comprehensive evaluation before a decision to fund a project is made, after the project is over and midway through. Current PVO evaluations, however, do not have the depth and breadth that would be necessary to move to a lower-frequency monitoring system. The kind of monitoring now being carried out or proposed, moreover, does not allow sufficient time or expertise for the monitor to detect some of the more important problems that the projects may be experiencing. (Cases of misuse of funds, for example, could probably not be detected in the short field visits now being carried out by project officers.) One might want to define a limited set of questions that can be easily or superficially dealt with, and limit monitoring to that.

6. The office should look at evaluation as an iterative process, with each evaluation providing a better idea of which project, or set of projects, should be evaluated next. Each evaluation, therefore, should be looked at as producing learning not only about the evaluated project, but about how to plan and do evaluation. The office, therefore, should worry less about mapping out everything in advance and more about how to learn from the evaluation process as each evaluation comes off the line, and how to feed that learning into the design of the next one.

7. An iterative approach to thinking about evaluations is commendable because of the dangers always inherent when evaluation is institutionalized. It is very difficult to keep systems of evaluation from becoming treated as ritual. They come to serve the function of showing more that the sponsoring agency is a legitimate organization--with a respectable system, budget and staff for evaluation--than of providing new, interesting and useful information on what projects are doing. (A good description of this legitimization and ritualistic process can be found in Meyer & Bowan [1977].) Many of the project evaluation summaries (PES) routinely required of AID missions are an example of the systematization problem, though there are some important exceptions. One wants to devise a system of evaluation, of course, so that the process of evaluation will run on its own. But the very systematization, and the freeing from concern that it provides, leads to a decline in the value of what evaluations yield. Though some degree of systematization will be necessary, of course, it is important to be aware of the dangers inherent in the process, and to appreciate the value of a more erratic, iterative, and random approach to evaluation. (Concrete suggestions can be found in points 15-20.)

8. PVC's concern with PVOs seems to have been focused too much on building "good" organizations according to the ideal model, rather than doing good projects. The one does not automatically lead to the other. PVC and the PVO evaluators often seem to have in mind the model of an

ideal and complete organization against which they measure, or make demands on, the PVO. But evaluations should give at least equal weight to judging a PVO by the project it produces: if the project was good, then the PVO was doing something right, even though the organization may look sloppy.

The YMCA evaluation is a good illustration of these points. The evaluator says that the organization shows strength and vitality that is rooted in local autonomy and popular volunteerism; but, he continues, there is a weak and constrained hierarchy largely dependent on local units for support, and attitude variations of local YMCA's from country to country are sometimes extreme, particularly with respect to the development process. These factors, the evaluator concludes, increase the difficulties of monitoring coherent development activities, and should be offset with more qualified development personnel and more clearly defined general policies. I disagree with this analysis, for the reasons stated above, and because there is probably a good argument to be made that the success of the organization at local levels may be consistent with its weakness in the other areas pointed out by the evaluator. If the recommendations are adopted, in other words, one perhaps runs a risk of losing the strengths the organization now shows.

The YMCA evaluation is not unique. I do not mean to single it out, but cite it because it is a typical example of the approach that I think needs modifying. Organizations are normally quite messy, chaotic and incomplete entities--even the good ones. I am concerned that the evaluators and the instructions to them assume that it is always to the good to fill in the "missing" parts of an organization. In so doing, one may not only compromise and endanger what the organization is good at, but one also misses understanding and appreciating what has been accomplished. Hence the importance of instructing evaluators to focus on judging the organization by its feats, rather than by an assumed model of what the ideal organization should look like or, as stated elsewhere, by what the organization said it was going to do, or by its goal-setting process or the consistency of it. All of these things are less important than the ability to accomplish something in the field.

9. Another aspect of the issue discussed above is that there is too much emphasis in scopes of work on what the organization's goals and objectives are, and how performance matches up. Evaluators should instead be directed to look at what actually happened. This is the more important and the more difficult thing to ascertain. Evaluators should ultimately make comparisons of goals to performance, but the emphasis on what happened should be much greater than that of ascertaining goals and measuring performance against them.

10. One way of getting around the problem of evaluations that focus too much on the organization as an end in itself is to draw less evaluators from the field of public or business administration, whose unit of analysis is the organization. Anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists and economists tend to have more of a view of the organization as only a part of a larger environment. Clearly, the best public-administration specialists can easily transcend their organization-specific focus. Similarly, many social scientists will end up doing organization-centered evaluation, partly because it is easier than bringing in the rest of the world to the analysis.

11. The office should rely less on PVO and PVO-related persons to do evaluations, mainly because they are not trained or experienced in dealing with the analytic questions discussed in this text. They also tend to see the environment as PVO-centered.

12. PVC evaluators need to be well informed on the state of the art in the relevant sector, and to reflect that knowledge in the report. Aside from explicit directions of this nature in the scope, this can be achieved in the following ways:

a) Contract with evaluators who are known to have an understanding of the state of the art, or ability to acquire it quickly.

b) Supply evaluators with, and make sure they read, the relevant state-of-the-art papers. The World Bank, as well as AID, has undertaken various research projects on the problems that PVO evaluators will deal with--measuring social impacts, small-business enterprise, effects of food supplements on child health, income distribution studies in various countries, etc. PVC should subscribe to Bank Staff Working Papers, if it already does not and should keep in touch with research-project directors in areas of interest. (Many of the working papers are issued as background papers many months before publication, and are usually available to all interested persons who are in contact with research directors.)<sup>1</sup>

c) Supply evaluators with, or require that they find, existing studies on income distribution in the country or region where they will be working; this will enable them to get a feel for the distribution in their area of evaluation, what the poorest poor do, and how to identify them.

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<sup>1</sup>The World Bank puts out a periodic publication on its research projects, giving information on who runs them, what has been published so far, and how to get hold of unpublished papers.

d) Supply evaluators with some of the literature on how to make impressionistic assessments of where people fall in the benefit distribution. One recent review of the anthropological literature on this subject is the Castro article on indicators of rural inequality (1981). Another source could be some of the papers from the Conference on Rapid Rural Appraisal sponsored by the Institute of Development Studies at Sussex. The International Center for Research on Women prepared a similar document for a training session for World Bank project officers, given in December 1981. PVC might want to acquire those instructions for dissemination to evaluators.

All of the above suggestions require no extra work on the part of PVC, in terms of designing scopes, posing questions, reading the literature, etc. They simply mean cashing in on the work other people have been doing, both inside AID and without.

13. The office should devise a standard set of questions regarding the competence of PVO staff: language ability, specialist or generalist training, experience with this kind of work, experience in the particular country, commitment, turnover rates. This will facilitate the drawing of some cross-project conclusions in the future.

14. Scopes for issue-oriented evaluations should ask that the final report include suggested questions on how the issue can be incorporated into future scopes for project and PVO evaluations, without making unrealistic demands on the evaluator's time or skills.

15. PVC staff, including project officers, should meet early on with an evaluator and convey the kinds of concerns they hope the evaluation can address, the kinds of missing information it would be hoped to provide, and the future decisions its result would be hoped to inform. Though these considerations are theoretically in the scope of work, they can often be better and more concretely conveyed verbally. Also, scopes cannot always reflect the specific concerns of certain up-and-coming decisions.

16. PVC should ask for feedback from evaluators about (a) how the conditions and instructions for doing their evaluation might have been improved; (b) what issues and doubts remained unresolved, and what questions might be looked into more in subsequent evaluation; (c) how they might incorporate certain important issues into scopes of work for future evaluators. Evaluators should also be asked for suggestions, after completing their own evaluation, about evaluations scheduled to be undertaken in the near future.

17. The office should keep a record of how useful any particular evaluation was, in what way it was used, what decisions it helped to make, and what changes it caused in decisionmaking or ways of thinking. Some evaluations will have no effect at all, which is an important thing to learn, so it is important not to "cook up" an impact where there really was none. Some of an evaluation's effects will only be felt over a longer term, so this exploration should be an ongoing effort. The results of this type of record will help the office to learn what types of evaluation and evaluators are most useful, as well as to improve the way it instructs evaluators.
18. Evaluation teams should have only one person responsible and accountable for the report and its contents. If responsibility is joint, and there is disagreement--as there often is--the result is frequently a process of compromising, of taking an average of the differing opinions--rather than the taking of a stand and a willingness to defend it. The averaging or consensus process can distort the real picture considerably, failing to bring out strengths and weaknesses. The person responsible must ultimately make a judgment, and should be chosen because of a trust in this judgment-making capability. Clearly, the person responsible should listen carefully to the opinions and facts of team members who disagree, and alter her argument accordingly to the extent she is convinced that she was wrong. But team leaders should not have to give in to opposing views of team members in order to be consensual.
19. The office should place as much thought and time into getting good evaluators as it puts into preparing scopes of work. A good evaluator will not need to be told many of the directions in the list of suggestions to evaluators. A weak evaluator will not do a significantly better job even with an improved scope of work.
20. The office should budget more time for each evaluation, even if this means doing less evaluations. PVC evaluation budgets allow one person-month's time on average, and often involve travel to several places--PVC in Washington, PVO headquarters somewhere else, and various project sites, many times in more than one country. Even the "rapid-feedback" evaluations of U.S. social service programs, as used by various U.S. agencies and recommended by The Urban Institute (Wholey 1981), involve a minimal time of three person-months for an evaluation that tells a manager whether she wants to embark on a subsequent full-scale evaluation.

If the real cost of the AID impact evaluations were calculated--and these evaluations were among the best of the PVO evaluations--they would probably amount to several times the person-months currently

budgeted by AID for any particular PVO evaluation. It is ironic that these evaluations drew on in-house AID staff so as to show that adequate evaluation could be done without spending large amounts of money. Yet if the staff time used were priced, it would represent much more than PVC now spends when it contracts out an evaluation.

If person-days on the PVC evaluation cannot be increased, then the number of project sites or countries visited should be reduced markedly. Otherwise, time is not sufficient to talk with the range and number of persons necessary to understand a project's impact.

21. The office could increase the number of good evaluators on its projects by (a) planning further ahead, so it can afford to wait for a favored evaluator to be available; and (b) allowing the choice of projects for evaluation to be influenced by the preferences of the evaluator. Both actions will help lure good evaluators to work on the office's evaluations. At this point, I think that better evaluation results will occur if good evaluators are used, with the loss of some control over timing and project choice, than if a more ordered evaluation planning process is carried out by average evaluators.

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This bibliography is in two parts. The first part is a list of PVO evaluations in the files of the Offices of Private and Voluntary Cooperation and of Program and Management Support. The second part, "references," is a list of non-AID materials cited in the text or read by me in preparation for writing the report.

The PVO evaluations of the first part are organized in the following manner. Evaluations are categorized by region--Africa, Asia, Latin America, Near East, and "Worldwide." (North African countries are placed within the Near East category, corresponding to country placement in AID's regional bureaus.) Within the region, evaluations are arranged alphabetically by the name of the PVO. When the PVO name is without parentheses, the PVO itself did or contracted out the evaluation; with parentheses, AID or an AID contractor did the evaluation. At the end of each regional listing is a "general" category that lists evaluations that are not specific to any particular PVO, arranged alphabetically by author or sponsoring organization. In cases where the country of project location is not obvious from the author or title, the country appears in parentheses at the end of the citation.

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